

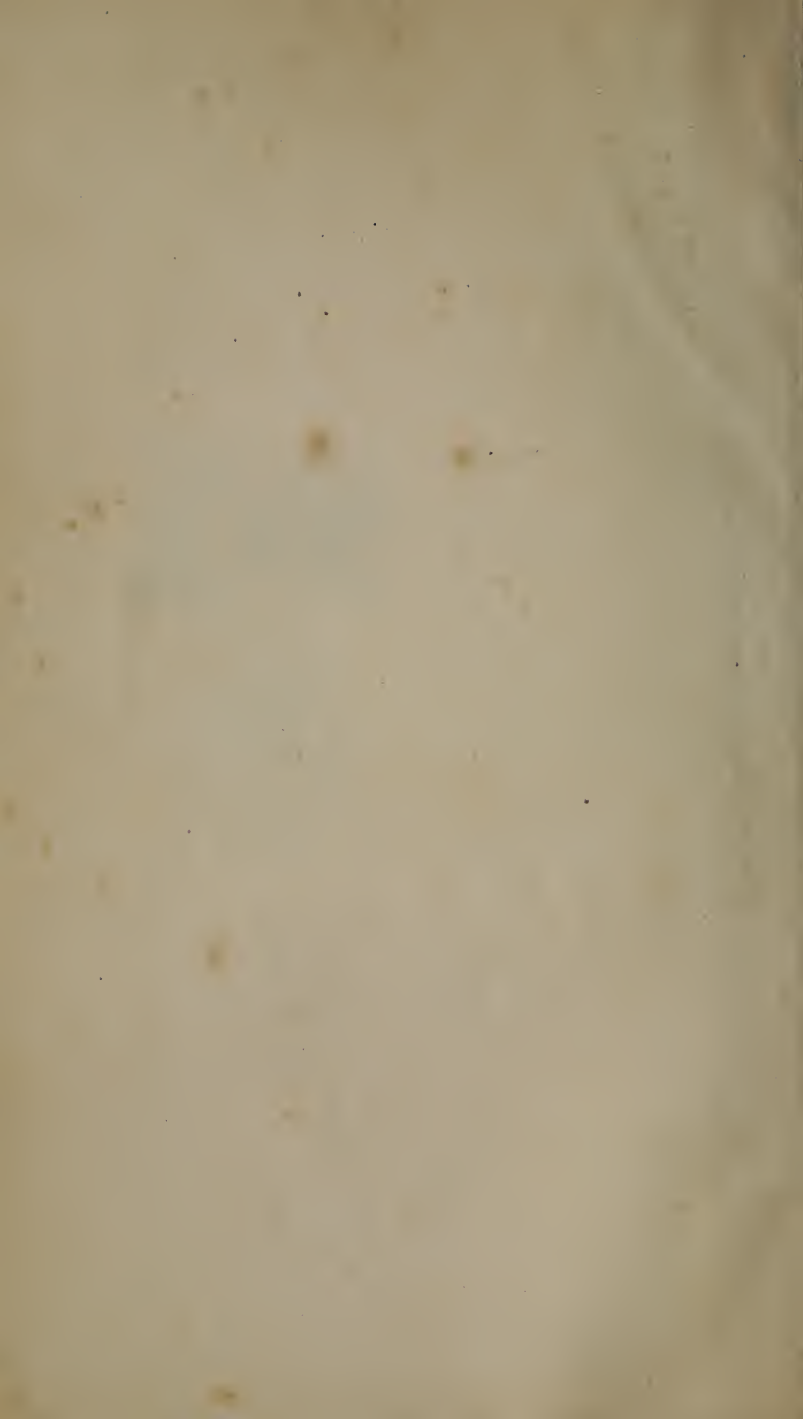




LIBRARY  
OF THE  
UNIVERSITY  
OF ILLINOIS

823  
J23S  
1848  
v. 3







THE  
STEP - M O T H E R.

BY  
G. P. R. JAMES, Esq.,  
AUTHOR OF  
"RICHELIEU," "THE SMUGGLER," "THE CONVICT," &c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:  
SMITH, ELDER, AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.  
1848.



823

J23A

1848

v. 3.

## THE STEP-MOTHER.

---

### CHAPTER I.

THE housekeeper's room at Mallington Hall was one of those small, square, lofty chambers which our ancestors of the reign of George the First and George the Second occasionally stuck into any spare corner, with which they had nothing else to do. It had certainly not been intended originally for the purposes to which it was now applied; for it was elegant in its decorations, and in the better and newer part of the house. The panelling, to which, in the other rooms, the wider extent of the walls gave symmetry and due proportion, here ran up tall and slender; and each long parallelogram was surrounded by its wreath of carved flowers. It was a very comfortable room, however, having but two windows and one door—a great advantage in these northern climes. It was

carpeted, too, and the huge fire-place, with its massive mantel-piece, well supplied with logs, was blazing brightly, and crackling cheerfully; but yet, on the night of the Sunday which we have been lately speaking of, good old Mrs. Chalke, the housekeeper, as she sat before the fire, was in anything but a merry, or even a tranquil mood. There was some wind stirring, and occasionally the panelling cracked, or the tall window rattled; and, whenever such was the case, the good old lady started and looked round, expecting to see neither ghost nor hobgoblin, but some more terrible apparition still, of flesh and blood, armed with cold steel and leaden bullets against the scanty remains of life which yet were hers. Once, when the gust was more vehement than ordinary, and, like an importunate beggar, clamoured loudly for admittance, she suddenly stretched out her hand, and seized the bell, forgetting that the girl, who was her only companion in the house, could render her but little effectual assistance; or, perhaps, thinking that if she was to be murdered, she had better be so in the presence of respectable witnesses.

Though the gust died away, good Mrs. Chalke still held the bell-rope in her hand; and, at length, after some consideration, she gave it a gentle pull. In a minute or two after, a quick pair of feet were heard coming along the passage, and the housemaid appeared, with a face of agitation and alarm, as if she expected to behold some horrible spec-

tacle. In fact, the nerves of both the poor women had been sadly shattered by the late attempt upon the house.

"What o'clock is it, Sally?" asked Mrs. Chalke, turning to the housemaid.

"Lord ha' mercy, ma'am!" exclaimed the latter, "I thought something was the matter; and, though I must be about the place, I feel quite in a twitter as soon as ever I am left alone. Then those long passages frighten me out of my life, every time I go through them."

Sally had not answered the housekeeper's inquiry, however, and Mrs. Chalke repeated it, obtaining for a reply the information, that it was a quarter past ten by the clock in the kitchen.

"Dear me!" exclaimed the housekeeper, "what can make Mr. Edmonds so late? I hope nothing has happened to him."

"Oh! I dare say not, ma'am," rejoined Sally. "You know he's always out long on Sunday nights; for he says that bad characters are always more about then than on any other day."

"That's what I am afraid of," replied Mrs. Chalke; "and, while he's looking after the game, we might all have our throats cut."

"Dear me, ma'am! don't talk so," said Sally; "I declare you make my blood quite cruddle. I haven't slept a wink one blessed night since those fellows tried to break in; and I dare say they would murder me first, all along of my having

been the one to ring the alarum-bell, which spoiled their sport."

"No; they would murder me first, for the keys," said Mrs. Chalke, jealous of the dignity of her office; "and, besides, I dare say they know nothing about who rung the bell. It must be a terrible thing to have one's throat cut. I've had no stomach for mutton ever since."

Sally, who did not see the connection between mutton and housebreakers, gazed in Mrs. Chalke's face with a lack-lustre look—partly of stupidity, and partly of horror—thinking that the worthy housekeeper was becoming slightly deranged, and repeating the word "mutton!" in a tone of doubt and inquiry, till Mrs. Chalke replied, "Yes, mutton to be sure. Don't butchers cut sheeps' throats, as housebreakers cut ours?"

"Dear heart!" replied Sally, "so they do;" and she put her hand under her chin, as if to ascertain whether the operation had been actually performed upon her.

Just at that moment the bell rang sharply, and both the good women started, and both screamed; after which, it suddenly struck Sally that it must be Edmonds himself, who had slept at the house constantly since the night of the attack. Communicating this supposition to Mrs. Chalke, she hurried to the door, while the housekeeper followed, with a flat candlestick in her hand, laying strong injunctions on her companion not to turn

key, or draw bolt, till they had ascertained who was the visitor.

"Who's there?" exclaimed Sally, putting her mouth down to the lock.

"Who's there?" cried Mrs. Chalke; adding, as a caution to the maid, "don't put your head there girl; he might shoot you through the key-hole."

Almost at the same moment, however, the well-known voice of Edmonds answered, "It's I, Sally; let us in,"—and joyfully the door was opened, and poor Edmonds, with a face haggard and worn, both with bitter care and fatigue, entered the hall.

"Dear me, Mr. Edmonds," said Mrs. Chalke, "I'm so glad to see you. I began to think you wouldn't come to-night, and we were—in such a trepidation."

"Oh! you need not have been afraid," replied the park-keeper; "you might be sure I would come, Mrs. Chalke. It's a duty to my employer; and I won't fail in my duty, whoever does. But I thought it best to take a longer round to-night with my men than usual; for I heard about six o'clock, from Blackmore, the gardener, that he had seen some fellows, of whom I have strong suspicions, driving this way from Sturton this morning. I could find nobody, however. I am very tired, for I've gone good twelve miles, besides my walk in the morning. I wonder what tires me so soon; but one breaks down like an



old tree. First goes one branch, and then another ; and each leaves a gap, where the weather pours in, and rots the whole core."

While he thus spoke, he paused in the hall, addressing the beginning of his speech to the housekeeper, and ending it apparently to himself, with his eyes fixed upon the stone pavement, and his head bent forward, in an attitude of melancholy thought. He looked sad, and somewhat wild ; and Mrs. Chalke, remarking the expression of his countenance, and thinking that the weight of his sorrows must have been greatly aggravated by corporeal fatigue, begged him to come into her sitting-room, and take a glass of ale and something to eat.

"Thank you, ma'am, thank you," said Edmonds, "I will come and sit down a bit, and perhaps take a jug of beer, for I am weary and thirsty ; but I can't eat anything, for I have no stomach now. I shall go to bed soon, for I hope to sleep to-night. It's a long time since I slept."

The good lady, however, when once he was seated by her fire, and the jug of strong ale, with which she intended to strengthen both the inner and the outer man, placed beside him at the table, attempted to while away the time by asking questions, although, to say sooth, Edmonds was very little inclined for conversation. It is a mistake, however, that many people make, who think that they can wean us from our sorrows by calling our mere words to indifferent

topics. As well might they think to relieve a mother's mind by taking her on some trifling errand from the cradle of her sick babe. The heart and the thoughts are still with our sorrows, whatever subject may employ our tongues.

She was still going on in the same strain, when suddenly, with a great start, she exclaimed, "Goodness gracious! what's that? Didn't you hear a step?"

The next instant the cause of the phenomenon she had remarked became evident by Sally putting in her head, and inquiring "Wouldn't you like a toast with your beer, sir?"

"How can you frighten one so, girl?" cried Mrs. Chalke, in a petulant tone; "I declare I thought it was the robbers broke in."

"No, I thank you, Sally," replied Edmonds; "but haven't you any common beer. This ale is too strong."

"There is not a drop in the house, sir," replied the housemaid; "but as to its being too strong, it will do you no harm. It's every drop of it pure malt and hops. Home made, I can assure you, just before my lord died."

These last words threw Edmonds into a new fit of meditation. "Ay," he said thoughtfully, "it was a bad day for Mallington Hall when he died; things have gone wrong ever since, and we never know you see, Mrs. Chalke, what it is to have a good thing till we lose it. A good master is a good thing, and he was a good master."

for he was always very reasonable and inclined to do what was right and proper, when people told him how."

"Well, I hope this young gentleman will be as good as he," said Mrs. Chalke. "When do you think he'll take possession, Mr. Edmonds?"

"I don't know, I don't know," answered Edmonds; "I tell you, my good dame, you are mistaken. I am just as ignorant about all these things as you are;" and Mrs. Chalke, finding that she could make nothing of him, rose, saying, "Well, now you are come I shall go to bed and sleep in peace. I shouldn't have winked an eye all night if you hadn't been here. You had better have your gun with you in your room—there it stands in the corner. Don't forget it, there's a good man, for if they were to get hold of it they might blow all our brains out."

"No fear, no fear," answered Edmonds, turning his back to the fire. "There is nobody to be afraid of within five miles, unless they be in Mallington, and there are sharp eyes looking out for them there too. You may rest quietly enough—nobody will disturb your sleep."

"She has no daughter!" continued the poor park-keeper, murmuring to himself, as soon as Mrs. Chalke was gone. "I wish I were dead, though it is a sin to say so, with all the blessings that God has still given me. I wish I could think of other things;" and after pressing his hand upon his brow for a moment, he took up the jug

of beer again and emptied it at a draug ht. The quantity it had contained was not sufficient to have any effect upon his intellect ; but still the beer was very strong, and he himself weary and exhausted. It seemed to soothe him—to render him, perhaps, a little more drowsy than before, and after standing before the table a minute or two, he took up the candle which Mrs. Chalke had left and walked slowly away towards the chamber which he had lately tenanted on the ground-floor, leaving his gun behind him.

## CHAPTER II.

ALFRED LATIMER, as we have seen, sprang over the paling, and stood within the enclosure of Mallington Park. When he had done so he gazed around him for an instant, and a sudden change came over his countenance. It seemed to him as if he had awakened in a moment from a dream, as if all that had passed during the last week had been a troublous vision, and that now for the first time he unclosed his eyes to the reality. He asked himself where he was, what he was doing, why he came thither; and he seemed confounded and bewildered as his heart answered the question, and he found himself hurrying forward to an act the consequences of which might be discovery, apprehension, trial, and an ignominious death. He could scarcely believe it true. All the inducements, all the sophistry, all the passions which had hitherto prompted him seemed to have died away suddenly in the cold night air, and there he stood marked out as a mere robber, without the power

of summoning up the evil spirit to support him with false reasonings, and palliate the extent of his guilt.

It was an awful moment, but it was quickly over, for Williams almost instantly touched his arm, saying "Come along, what are you stopping for? You are not going to show the white feather now?"

It might be that he spoke from having at some former time experienced such sensations himself; it might be that he divined what was passing in his young companion's heart by that intuitive perception which some men have into all the modifications of character. However, he undoubtedly addressed himself to the thoughts which were present to Alfred Latimer's mind, and the words he used were those best calculated to negative the effect produced by the newly-raised voice of conscience. The young man merely replied, "Oh dear, no!" and followed him instinctively through the nearer trees, across the warren, and towards the back of Mallington Hall. Often had he trod those paths, often had he traversed those woods in happier days. Sometimes he had watched for Lucy there, occasionally with angry feelings at her delay, occasionally with the natural impatience of an eager and impetuous spirit; but he had never felt as he did then—he had never known thought to be such a burden as it seemed during the next five minutes. His only resource was to fly from



thought. "Show the white feather!" he repeated to himself more than once. "Oh, no! that's out of the question; but I wish I had not got into this business. There's no use thinking of it, however. Here I am, and it must be done;" and, advancing to Williams's side, he asked him something in a whisper.

"Hush!" said the depredator; "I thought I heard a whistle;" and creeping slowly on for about a quarter of a mile further, he looked out into the more open part of the park. At some two or three hundred yards distance was a large clump of old elms, in advance of another portion of the wood, and Williams thought he saw something underneath them. After waiting for a minute he whispered to his companions, "Be ready to be off like a shot!" and then ventured a low whistle. It was answered the next minute, and the form of a man came out into the moonlight, then retreated again, and was lost to the eye.

"That was like Maltby, wasn't it?" inquired Williams; and the gruff voice of the man Brown replied, "Ay, that's he."

After a short pause the whistle was repeated, and Williams observed. "He is coming round. We must show him where we are." Thus saying he uttered another whistle, to which there was a reply somewhat nearer than before.

"Did you expect him here?" asked Alfred Latimer. "I thought he was to bring up the gig to the corner of the park."



“Ay, but he was to let me know if he heard anything fresh,” was the answer; and, a few moments after, they plainly heard a rustle in the wood, and the fall of a footstep. Williams quietly drew forth a pistol; but the next instant Maltby’s voice was heard inquiring, “Where are you, Williams?”

“Here, here!” answered the other. “Is there any danger ahead?”

“No!” answered Maltby, coming up. “They are all gone quietly to bed; for I’ve been watching for this last half hour, and saw the lights put out in the different rooms; but I thought you’d like to know that Edmonds sleeps at the house every night; so that unless you get hold of him first you may have a devil of a work.”

“Ah!” said Williams, “how did you hear that, Bill?”

“Why, it was old Blackmore told me,” answered the young man. “I went down this evening to ask where his son was, for he’s never come back, and the old man took it kind, and was more civil than ordinary.”

“Perhaps it isn’t true,” said Williams.

“Oh! yes it is,” rejoined the other, “for I went up afterwards to Mother Witherton at the lodge, and I found out from her that Edmonds sleeps in the little room near the library, where he can hear both ways what’s going on at each side of the house.”

“He shan’t hear me till he sees me,” answered

Jack Williams, with a laugh; "but we must make him fast first, that's clear. Have you got the flint and steel, Brown? We may as well light the dark lantern, as there's likely to be more work than we thought."

A flint and steel were soon produced, and the dark lantern was opened, lighted, and closed again.

"Now, Bill, run and get the gig; quick, for I am determined this shall go through to-night," continued Williams.

"Hadn't you better cross the water with the punt, and start from the other side?" asked Maltby; "I left it there on purpose. There are some people still about at Mallington, and if I go rattling over the bridge in the gig I shall be sure to have folks looking at me."

"That's true," answered Williams; "and you're right, Master Bill. You can bring it down at the end of the lane, and then nobody shall see it come or go."

This being agreed upon, Maltby slunk away through the woods again, and his three companions crept silently and stealthily on towards Mallington Hall. When they had reached the point of the wood nearest to the mansion they paused once more, and gazed over the whole building. All was dark, no window showed a light, and, proceeding from one detached tree to another, they approached nearer and more near, till they were close to the outbuildings and enclosed courts at the back of the house.

A large old walnut-tree grew near the wall, and stretched its long and rugged arms over into the stable-yard, and, once under its branches, their proceedings were quick and easy. Williams swarmed up the tree in a minute, walked along one of the thick overhanging boughs, and reached the top of the wall. He then aided his two companions to mount, and jumped lightly down upon a pile of straw and rubbish below. The other two descended as rapidly and noiselessly, and then, taking their way across the court, they approached a small door in the main building. Jack Williams had laid his schemes well. Applying the false key to the lock, he turned it with little or no sound, and then, feeling for the latch, he raised it, pushed the door open, and listened. Every one held their breath; but all was as silent as the grave, and turning the shade of the lantern, Williams and his companion looked in. Nothing was seen, however, that could alarm them. A long narrow stone passage, with one or two empty tubs lying against the wall, was all that they saw, and Alfred Latimer having now plunged fully in, and knowing that all chance of retreat was out of the question, whispered to Williams, "I will show you the way; I know it well, and can find it in the dark, so you had better shade the lantern again."

"Not yet," said Williams, in the same tone; "we may stumble over some of these d—d things in the passages, There is no one here to see,


and in the great hall we shall get the moonlight through the windows."

Without reply, Alfred Latimer passed him and went on, drawing one of the pistols from his pockets, however, and cocking it.

"He's a bold young devil!" murmured Jack Williams to himself as he followed, while Tom Brown came behind in silence. Thus proceeding they reached the end of that passage, turned into another at the left, and mounted three or four steps, for the house was built upon an irregular foundation. They then passed between the kitchen and servants' hall, the butler's pantry, and what was called the still-room, beyond which came a pair of folding-doors covered with baize, and having a stone staircase on the left hand. Here, however, they were brought to a sudden stop, for the folding-doors were bolted on the other side; and Alfred Latimer proposed to lead them by the stone stairs, and the corridor above, down the great staircase, to the room where poor Edmonds slept.

"Let us put the crape over our faces first," said Williams, "for there's no need of his knowing who we are."

This was soon done; and Alfred Latimer, when he gazed through the dull veil which was spread over his eyes and fastened behind his head, at the countenances of his two companions, similarly disguised, fancied that it was impossible any one should recognise them. Then, after having



“ In the first place, Mr. Gibbs,” he replied, when his cogitations came to an end, “ let me inform you that you are mistaken in supposing that I am the person whom you saw talking with Lucy Edmonds. I never spoke to her out of her father’s house in my life, and at the time you mention was not a visitor here. May I ask how near you were to the person you supposed to be me ?”

“ Oh, dear sir, I was a long way off,” replied Mr. Gibbs. “ I was at the top of the house amusing myself, as I usually do, with this little instrument,” and he pulled out a small telescope from his pocket. “ From the window of my room,” he continued, “ I command the park on one side, and the hill up to the common on the other, and I see all that goes on in the place.”

“ I should not think it a very profitable or very worthy inquiry, sir,” replied Morton, “ but every man has his tastes ; and, as meddling with other people’s business is not one of mine, I can have nothing further to do with the matter you have mentioned, except, indeed, to say it would be, I think, but an act of Christian charity to warn poor Edmonds, that his daughter is placing herself in dangerous circumstances. That would be drawing some good from perquisitions which I cannot advise you to pursue further.”

“ You mistake, sir, you mistake ; allow me very



respectfully to say, you mistake," said Mr. Gibbs, with some warmth. "You must allow me, sir, to clear myself. I do not use my telescope for the purpose of prying into other people's affairs, though I can't help seeing them if they come in my way. Sir, the truth is this: I have been knocked down and robbed near here. We could not identify the man; but I am quite sure of who he is, and I am resolved to bring him to justice. I have fixed my eye upon a particular man, sir, and he shall find that he can't escape that eye. I watch him and his doings every moment I have to spare, and ere long I shall get hold of the end of the clue."

"That alters the case very materially, Mr. Gibbs," replied Morton, "and I trust that you will succeed; but, in regard to this poor girl, it would, I think, be but right to speak with her father upon the subject, and leave it to him to take such steps as he may think fit."

"May I ask, sir," said Mr. Gibbs, in a low tone, "whether he is acquainted or not with certain circumstances. I wish to act discreetly, sir; and would not, for the world, betray a secret which had accidentally fallen into my possession."

"You are quite right, Mr. Gibbs," said Morton. "But, to answer your question, he is not aware of anything; no one, indeed, is. The matter is of

no great consequence, indeed; but every man has his whim."

"Oh! certainly, sir, certainly," said Mr. Gibbs. "But I won't detain you longer, sir; and if you have any further commands for me you will find me at the inn, sir; for I have determined not to quit this place till I have got the right sow by the ear.—But you cannot think, sir, what an advantage it would be to your hair if you would use Grimsditch's incomparable Balm of Trinidad. It preserves and increases the natural curl; prevents it from falling off or turning grey; communicates to it an admirable gloss; keeps it always, whether in rain or heat, in perfect order; and, whether applied to the clustering ringlets of female loveliness, or to the bolder waves that float round the forehead of masculine beauty, it is admitted on all hands to be the only thing yet discovered which can be said to gild refined gold, and render perfection still more perfect."

"Well, send me some, Mr. Gibbs," replied Morton, smiling; "and now, indeed, I must go." Morton then hastened down to the drawing-room, but was disappointed in his hope of finding Louisa alone. Mrs. Charlton was, indeed, not yet down; but Dr. Western was seated on the sofa by the side of his fair ward.

"Ay, my young friend," said the clergyman,



with a laughing look towards Louisa: "I am very much in the way here, but I wanted to speak to you, so I came early, even at the risk of being the unfortunate third.—Nay, Louisa," he continued, seeing her rising as if she received what he said as a hint to leave them, "you know I am the friend of both, and give my hearty consent—so if you run away I shall think that you wish to hide your arrangements from me. I have nothing to say to him that you may not hear, though, perhaps, the confidence is not quite reciprocal. Morton, have you done what you said you would?"

"No, my dear sir," replied Morton, "I have had no time." All to-day we have been in the strait-waistcoat of society, and yesterday, while we were five minutes alone together, we somehow talked of other things."

"Oh! I know how quite well," answered Dr. Western; "but what need of time?—one minute will do it. My dear Louisa, let me introduce a friend of mine to you;" and leading Morton up to her, with a gay look, he whispered a word in her ear.

Louisa Charlton gazed in Morton's face with an expression of surprise almost amounting to alarm. But Morton, notwithstanding the good doctor's presence, threw his arms round her,

saying,—“ What, my beloved ! can a name make any difference to you ? ”

“ No,” murmured Louisa—“ oh ! no ; but this takes me very much by surprise.”

“ Our good friend here is wrong,” said Morton, “ in telling you thus, dear Louisa. Nay, he is wrong in telling you at all as yet ; for all is not settled, and I wished it to be so fully before I spoke.”

“ It is you who are wrong, Morton,” replied Dr. Western, “ the parson of the parish is always right. There should be no secrets between two people circumstanced as you are. Nay, more, I have to tell you, sir, that all is settled, as I will prove to you, if you will come and partake of a plain dinner with me to-morrow, at five, and then take a long walk. Louisa shall share the dinner if she will, but not the ramble ; and in the mean time, ma’am, remember that though I have taken the liberty of telling you other people’s secrets, you are not to follow my bad example.”

As he spoke, Mrs. Charlton entered the room, and found Morton, Louisa, and Dr. Western standing close together, with somewhat too evident symptoms of having been engaged in secret conclave. She made no observation, indeed ; but a slight smile, somewhat sarcastic and triumphant, crossed her lip, as if she would have said, had she

thought fit to speak what was passing within, "Ah! you think that I am blind; but you are playing my game while you imagine you are playing your own."

Dr. Western at once entered into conversation with the lady, telling her that "he had asked Miss Charlton and Mr. Morton to dine with him on the following day, and trusted she would be of the party."

"I suppose, in propriety, I ought to be," replied Mrs. Charlton; "but really, my dear sir, I have so many different things to do, that Louisa must go without a chaperon for once, especially when she is going to her guardian's house. Alfred tells me that you have been to see him, doctor, for which I am very much obliged."

"I thought it a duty, my dear lady," replied Dr. Western; "the accounts that reached me were so alarming that I feared I should find him very ill. There seems little the matter, however, but a few bruises; and I should think you could bring him home quite safely to-morrow."

Before Mrs. Charlton could reply, the door was thrown open to announce dinner, and the rector, advancing, gave her his arm, while Morton followed with Louisa.

## CHAPTER III.

MOTHER BROWN'S cottage was certainly by no means a pleasant place, and yet thither must I once more lead the gentle reader.

In the outer chamber of the cottage, which was divided into four rooms, two above and two below, and by the side of the large ill-constructed chimney sat Tom Brown, the widow's son, with an old yellow greasy tobacco-pipe in his mouth, puffing away clouds of no very fragrant smoke. There was something dull and yet fierce in the man's look; a dogged sullen brutality, more revolting to look upon than even the expression of more dangerous qualities, when lighted up by the beams of intellect and the fire of passion. He was a powerful fellow, as I have before described him; with a head immensely capacious and round behind; but so low and narrow in the forehead that his bristly hair reached within a finger's length of his eye-brows; and as he sa

there, though sometimes a momentary smile would change the expression of his dull face, yet in general a heavy frown still further contracted that meaningless and animal forehead. It is not necessary to inquire what emotions produced either the frown or the smile ; but their course was soon after interrupted by the entrance of Williams, who spoke with him for a moment or two by the fire, and then turned towards the door which led into the inner chamber.

“ Ah ! ” said Tom Brown, “ there he lies on his back, like a dead crow, when he ’s just as well as you or I, Jack. Well, I shall go and take a walk—I wonder what the devil he keeps lying there for ? ”

“ He knows what he ’s about,” answered Williams ; “ but don’t you go far, Tom, for we may want you. Where ’s your mother ? ”

“ Oh ! she ’s gone down to Mallington to buy some pork,” replied her son ; and thus saying he walked out of the door, and closed it behind him.

Jack Williams in the mean time entered the room where Alfred Latimer lay ; and the moment that he appeared the young gentleman started up in his bed, without any sign of pain or sickness, exclaiming, “ Well, I ’m devilish glad you ’ve come at last ; I thought you ’d never be here.”

"Why, I had a good deal to do," said Williams, "and one can't manage obstinate people in a minute, Mr. Latimer."

"Ay, that's what my mother said of me this morning," rejoined the young gentleman. "She was over here, and wanted me to go back to the house; for she and that old fool Western have been laying their heads together, and settling that this was a very bad place for me to stay in, so that, fever or no fever, I ought to be brought over to Mallington. I wouldn't go, however, and then, just to drive me, she said she couldn't spare Wilkinson any longer."

"What did you say to that?" demanded Jack Williams.

"Why, I said I could spare him very well," answered Alfred Latimer, "and so sent him about his business, glad enough to get rid of him. I promised to come over to-morrow, however; so whatever is to be done must be done to-night."

"Oh! I've got all ready," replied Jack Williams, "if you are strong enough."

"I'm quite well," replied Alfred Latimer. "There's nothing the matter with me; but I've been thinking, Jack, how the deuce we shall get her across the water and through the village without people seeing. She will never be able to walk to the other bridge."



"To be sure not," answered Williams; "that's what has kept me such a time, for I couldn't hire a punt, all I could do. One fellow said he was sure I was going to poach the river, and he might have his boat seized. However, at last I got hold of young Blackmore, who promised to draw his father's punt up and amongst the reeds there; then we can get across in the dusk, without being seen, and have her up to the cottage at Illington in no time. But mind, Mr. Latimer, you're to marry her, you know."

"Oh—ah! I'll marry her," replied Alfred Latimer; "I'll marry her—don't you be afraid."

"No, I'm not afraid," replied Williams; "for I wouldn't help you if I thought you'd cheat her; and having given me your promise, I look to you to keep it. So, as that's settled, I've got a pack of things for you here in the bundle that will make you look as much like a gamekeeper as possible, leather leggings and all; and if you start over the back way just before dusk you'll find me down by the water. We must get Tom Brown, however, to stay in the boat while we are in the park. It will be awkward, however, if she doesn't come, since you have promised to go home to-morrow."

"If she doesn't I won't go," replied Alfred Latimer. "It will do well enough, and nobody



suspect anything, while I am lying here and supposed to be ill; but if I were up at Malington House, and going about, they'd say directly I had taken her—but she'll come, I think."

In about ten minutes, the step of Tom Brown was heard crossing the floor of the next room in haste, and the moment after he opened the door and put his head in, saying, "I say, Mr. Williams, have you been talking loud with that window open, for there's been a d——d fellow hanging about on the outside listening, or I am mistaken."

Williams started up with a heavy brow, without any reply, and, running to the window, looked forth.

"He's gone, he's gone," said Tom Brown; "as soon as he saw me come down the hill he was off like a shot."

"Do you know him?" asked Williams.

"I'm not quite sure," answered Brown, "but I think, by the look of him, that it was that dancing-master looking cove who got his head broke and lost his money one day."

"He may get his head broken to better purpose if he comes listening here," said Williams, and then fell into a train of thought, from which he was roused after a moment or two by Alfred

Latimer exclaiming—"Why, if he has heard all, our scheme will be blown over the whole place."

"No, no," answered his companion, "he did not hear enough for that. No names were mentioned, you know; and he couldn't make out much of it. However, Tom, you run down to the bridge, and see whether he crosses or not. If we can make sure of him till five o'clock I'll take care of him after that. He shan't blab till the thing is done, at all events."

"You stay there till Williams comes down to you," said Alfred Latimer, "and I'll give you five shillings for your pains, Brown."

Now, people's estimation of their conscience is very different in different individuals; but, unlike the appreciation of any other thing, the less a man has of it the less value does he place upon it. What is there on earth that Tom Brown would not have done for five shillings? As to selling his soul, that was no great matter; for, notwithstanding all that Dr. Western could do, he was not quite sure whether he possessed a soul or not; and if he had, the property undoubtedly was deeply mortgaged. But he would have taken the life of another and put his own neck in jeopardy at any time for a pound, and would have risked Botany Bay, the hulks, or

the pillory for any of the aliquot parts of the same sum. On his present errand, he set off at once with so rapid a step that he overtook Mr. Gibbs half way down the hill, and saw him enter the inn before he took his station on the bridge. The guard he kept was uninterrupted; for whether it was that the worthy traveller was conscious of being watched, or whether some other occupation kept him within, he did not issue forth again till the figure of Jack Williams was seen walking with a slow pace, and the usual swinging gait of a sailor, down towards the side of the river. No verbal communication took place between the two confederates, but the thumb pointed back over the right shoulder indicated to Tom Brown that he was to go back to the cottage, and Williams, walking into the inn, asked if Mr. Gibbs was at home. The landlady, the ostler, and the barmaid all looked at Jack Williams with a sort of shy and unpleasant aspect, which certainly was not very encouraging; but Mrs. Pluckrose replied civilly that she believed the gentleman was in, and sent to see; while Williams turned his back to the bar, looked out at the door, and twisted a cane switch which he held in his hand into a variety of curious forms.

While pausing there, he saw the carriage of

Mrs. Charlton going down the hill towards the rectory, with the sweet countenance of Louisa sitting calmly beside Mr. Morton, very apparent through the windows. There might be a slight glow upon her cheek; but she did not seem at all anxious to avoid being seen thus publicly with her lover; and Williams himself, as well as the two Misses Martin, and Messrs. Crump and Dixon, looked upon the approaching wedding as a settled thing.

“Well, I declare!” cried Miss Mathilda Martin.

“Bold enough, truly,” said Miss Martin; “but what could be expected with such a step-mother?”

“I think his impudence is worse than hers,” rejoined Mathilda. “I declare I’ve a great mind to write and tell the other guardian, in an anonymous kind of way, what Mrs. Charlton is encouraging and Dr. Western suffering.”

“Wait a little, Matty,” said her sister; “the good lady is a deep one, and we have not seen the end of it yet.”

Before this interesting conversation had come to its conclusion, Mr. Williams had been introduced into the chamber of Mr. Gibbs, and a bowl of punch had been ordered, which speedily appeared. Mr. Gibbs, who paid with a degree of regularity for everything he bought, which he

often wished that others would imitate, drew forth a ten-pound note, and asked the maid who brought the punch to change it; and on her returning with the note unchanged, he applied to his new companion, but without success. Williams, for some reason, declared that he had no change, though his pocket was very heavy, and the girl civilly insisting that there was no hurry, Mr. Gibbs was obliged to desist. He was courtesy itself to his guest—he plied him with punch, he talked to him incessantly, he mingled soft allusions to the fragrant Balm of Trinidad with expressions of regret at having ever been betrayed into the folly of thinking that a seafaring gentleman like Mr. John Williams could have committed a highway robbery.

Williams listened to him with grim gravity; nothing that Mr. Gibbs could say could move him to more than a sardonic smile. In short, Jack Williams was an old bird, and was not to be caught with chaff such as Mr. Gibbs threw down before him. On the Balm of Trinidad, however, he was somewhat more discursive; and when they had well nigh got to the bottom of the bowl of punch, he began to twist upon his finger the long ringlets that hung over his whiskers, and inquired particularly into the merits of that fragrant essence. It was



a subject upon which Mr. Gibbs was eloquent, and he enumerated some nineteen or twenty of its admirable qualities, till at length Mr. Williams felt in his pocket and asked the price, producing at the same time a crown piece. The ruling passion strong in death showed Mr. Gibbs the opportunity of doing a little business, and unable to resist, he said, "The retail price was in truth seven-and-six-pence, but he would pass it to his friend Mr. Williams at the wholesale rate of five shillings."

"Well, then, let us have a bottle!" exclaimed Jack Williams, giving another coxcomb twist to the corkscrew curl.

Immediately Mr. Gibbs started up from the table; and approaching a large leather-covered case, which stood in the window, he dived into the interior thereof to bring up a bottle of the Balm of Trinidad. As he was doing so he heard the ladle rattle in the bowl, and turned his head round, when he saw Mr. Williams helping himself to some more punch.

"I've taken the liberty, Mr. Gibbs," said Jack Williams, in a slow tone, "to drink your health during your absence. Shall I fill your glass to return thanks?"

"Thank you, I'm coming back directly," said Mr. Gibbs; and, returning to the table, he pre-



the plate behind. I like your resolution, sir, in settling the affair with this poor fellow yourself. Many a man, and a brave man, too, would have waited for us to come down. We won't leave him there, however. Let us put him on the bed."

Thus saying, he took the corpse by the shoulders, and, though unwillingly, Alfred Latimer did not like to refuse to bear a part; so, lifting the body of poor Edmonds between them, they laid him on the bed where he had been sleeping, and then turned towards the door.

"Why, you have got yourself all over blood, Mr. Latimer," said Williams. "But never mind, come along, you can have Brown's smock-frock till you can change your things."

Thus saying, he led the way out of the room and up the stairs again towards the plate-room, where the lantern had been left burning on the floor. They found Brown at the door, and, though some sharp words passed between him and Williams, they did not discover whether he had been in the room or not. They entered, however, and the sight of all the wealth that the late Earl of Mallington had there accumulated soon drove from the thoughts of Williams at least all memory of the deed that had been done below. Alfred Latimer, less accustomed to scenes of blood, was longer in recovering himself; but when a change did take place it ran into a greater extreme, and became the sort of wild intoxication of despair. He talked, he even

laughed, when loading himself with the money and the trinkets they found ; but his words were wild and whirling, like those of a man half inebriated.

It was speedily decided that all the heavier articles of plate should be left, and in about a quarter of an hour they had possessed themselves of even a larger booty than they expected. When this was done they descended to the hall again, and Williams said, "I will go and put out that light."

"A devil of a deal better just pop it to the curtains of the bed," said Brown ; "then there would be one grand blaze, and the whole job would be over, and no one know anything about it."

"No," said Williams, sternly, "that's needless. The women don't know us, and there's no use of hurting them."

He then entered the room where poor Edmonds lay, and blew out the candle ; and threading the various passages of the house by the light they carried, they reached the door by which they had entered. There the lantern was also extinguished, and issuing out into the yard, they easily got over the wall into the open ground of the park ; and thence took their course towards the river.

All was still and silent ; the clear moon shining calm and peacefully over the glades and dells ; not a sound but the whispering of the light breeze among the trees and the fern ; no sight of a living

thing but when they startled a herd of deer or roused a hare to scamper away in the moonlight. Nothing could form a stronger contrast than the scene without, in its clear, cool, lustrous tranquillity, with the fierce and agitating passions within the bosoms of those unhappy men. At length, when they came amongst the trees by the river side, Williams stopped and proposed to Brown that he should give his smock-frock to Alfred Latimer. The inferior ruffian, however, did not choose to part with it without compensation, and exacted a guinea as the price of the garment. Paying the money with a curse, Latimer took the smock-frock and drew it over his other dress, which had before been altered to make him look as much like a countryman as possible. Approaching the little creek where poor Lucy had been carried not long before, they found the punt lying quietly at the bank. As they got in, however, what between agitation and the load he carried, Alfred Latimer stumbled, and his hat fell into the river. Brown, who was already in the boat, strove to catch it with the pole; but in so doing he pressed it down, and it filled and sank.

“That’s devilish unlucky!” cried Williams; “what’s to be done now?”

“Why, I must go home,” said Alfred Latimer, “and change my dress altogether. I can put these things away where nobody will find them. I can get up one of the windows, I dare say.”

“You must be quick, then,” said Williams, as

they pushed away into the stream, "for we must be far off before daylight, and it's past twelve now. There's Maltby, I fancy, standing on the shore. We'll wait for you at the cottage, by the common, where you took Lucy, if you will run up the back lanes to the house. Only don't be long, and mind you stow away the things where they can't be found."

"No fear, no fear," replied Latimer; and the boat pushed on to the bank, where the form of Bill Maltby became more and more distinct, as they approached. The horse and gig, however, were not to be seen; and Williams's first salutation to his accomplice was an inquiry as to the cause of this deficiency.

"Hush!" said Maltby; "don't speak loud. Harry Soames has got a warrant against you, Jack; and, hearing that you were at the Hog-in-Armour, farther down, he's gone to see if he can nab you. He doesn't want, that's the fact, but he was obliged to go down, and so he told me all about it. I took the horse up to the back of the common, and there left him and the gig, because Harry must come back this way. He'll be half an hour first; but still we had better be off as quick as possible."

"We're a match for him if he does come," answered Williams, stepping out of the boat; "but there's no use risking anything, or breaking a man's head if one can help it. So you start off quick, Mr. Latimer. We will wait for you three quarters of an hour."

## CHAPTER V.

WE must now turn for a while to Mallington House, and to one whom we have neglected of late—although, to say the truth, there is no person on the scene in whom we take a deeper interest; but as in nature so in a tale, true or false, if nature be its guide, the inferior, the less interesting, the more insignificant, and the more unworthy characters, work out the fate of the higher and the nobler; and, by tortuous, minute, and often despicable means, produce great and important results, affecting persons and events apparently far beyond their reach and scope. Thus the coral insects, with their minute architecture, raise up, from the bottom of the deep Pacific Sea, whole clusters of islands, speedily inhabited by human beings, amongst whom, at no distant date, civilisation is destined to flourish, and the crowning gift to be added—the knowledge of God, and the faith in the Saviour.

Yet Louisa Charlton—sweet Louisa Charlton—I return to her with pleasure, and could pause



long, without unwillingness, to paint her on that eventful Saturday, when her lover was carried away. I could dwell upon all the painful emotions of her heart—all the dreadful images that terror suggested—all the dull and heavy vacancy that the very thought of losing him, whom only she loved, produced in her bosom. I could willingly tell, too, how she strove for calmness—how she succeeded in suppressing any vehement expression of alarm—and how she suggested various means, that others had not thought of, for discovering Morton's fate.

But pictures of this kind are not always pleasant to the reader; and it may be only necessary to state that, towards evening, Louisa's grief and anxiety were considerably aggravated by the demeanour of her step-mother. Mrs. Charlton herself was considerably annoyed at the unexplained absence of Mr. Morton. She felt really alarmed, lest any serious evil should have befallen him—not in the slightest degree upon his account but entirely upon her own. He was one of the materials which she had used in constructing a scheme which she had long nourished; and the porcelain manufacturer could not be more provoked, at seeing a vase which he had painted with the greatest delicacy crack to pieces in the firing, than Mrs. Charlton was at the bare idea of Morton getting himself murdered at the very moment when she intended to make use of him. He might have been hanged, shot, or have had



his throat cut, without calling forth anything whatsoever from Mrs. Charlton, but the simple exclamation of "Dear me, how unfortunate!" had it not been that she had determined, on that very Saturday, to bring matters to a crisis; and Mr. Morton being abstracted from the sum total of events which she had counted upon, her whole calculations were thrown out. Nor was there any possibility of arranging and executing a new scheme within any reasonable time; and, besides, the ruins of the old one were, like most other ruins, likely to present a great obstruction to any other scheme at all. Louisa, she saw, was evidently in love with Morton, and she knew too well that she was not a person easily to love again. Besides, where could she hope for such facilities? One of Louisa's guardians had been the very person to introduce the two young people to each other, and his co-executor and fellow-guardian, except in matters of accounts, was entirely ruled by Dr. Western; so that every difficulty had been smoothed down, and Mrs. Charlton had anticipated nothing but a gentle acquiescence in her wishes, as soon as they were delicately propounded to Mr. Morton, in conjunction with the information that his marriage with Louisa entirely depended upon her good will and pleasure. All these gay dreams, however, were scattered and tossed about by the disappearance of Mr. Morton, and the fair lady of Mallington House worked herself into a high state of irritation before dinner

was set upon the table. Louisa's external calmness, too, served but to aggravate such feelings, and she took the very first opportunity, in the course of the evening, of venting her anger upon her unoffending step-daughter. Whatever Louisa had replied, would not have made any difference in Mrs. Charlton's conduct; for she was determined that the young lady should be resolved to offend her, and she was offended accordingly. Having worked herself up into a mighty passion, she proclaimed a headache, and retired to her own dressing-room, where the scene took place with Mrs. Windsor which we have already depicted.

In the mean time, Louisa turned her thoughts to the painful subject of contemplation afforded by Morton's continued absence. In solitude and silence—with no one to comfort, with nothing to re-assure, with no object to divert her attention—the feelings of her heart had nearly overpowered her. The tears did rise into her eyes; and she was struggling to keep the flood from pouring down, when the servant announced Dr. Western, and Louisa started up with hope and terror, which always walk hand in hand through the dim vale of uncertainty. The expression of the good rector's face, however, at once relieved her. There was a joyful smile upon it, such as she knew his kind heart could not give, unless the tidings he bore were happy. She saw that he was the messenger of peace, and his first words proved it likewise.

“ I have got good news, my love,” he said; “ and I am glad to find you alone, for they are for your ear only. Morton is quite well, and safe;” and he went on to tell her all that he thought necessary,—remembering, however, the good solicitor’s caution, and not saying more than was required to set her heart at rest.

Louisa was easily satisfied. We must not say that she was not anxious to hear all the circumstances—that she did not ask some questions—for, of course, the subject was an interesting one to her; but still she knew Dr. Western so well, that she was sure that nothing on earth would induce him to give her hopes of Morton’s safety, unless he was safe, or to conceal the facts from her without necessity. He told her, too, where her lover was, and mentioned his own intention of going over the following day; but the rest of their conversation would not be very interesting, if detailed here, being soon after interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Windsor; and, after remaining a short time longer, he took his leave and departed.

The next day passed. Louisa was cheerful, from renewed hope; Mrs. Charlton was in a languid and somewhat dolorous mood. She lay upon her sofa, in her dressing-room, the whole morning, in the patience-on-a-monument style, and Louisa went to church by herself. Her step-mother called her a selfish, unfeeling girl; but the words were not addressed to Louisa’s ear,

and would not have pained her much if she had heard them. At dinner Mrs. Charlton treated her coldly, and somewhat repulsively; but yet she could not help fancying, from her step-daughter's calmness, that she must have some assurance of Morton's safety, which was a comfort to herself also. A little after tea she retired to rest, giving a hint, both to Louisa and the servants, that she wished to have the house kept quite silent.

Though by no means disposed to sleep—for Dr. Western had given her some hope of Morton's return that night, or on the following morning—Louisa willingly enough went to her own room, which her father had taken care should be fitted up with every comfort and convenience. She there sat, reading and listening alternately, till all hope of Morton coming that night was over; and even afterwards, as the book she had taken up interested her, she went on with its perusal, leaning her fair head upon her hand, and mingling the thoughts of the author with her own. The clock struck twelve—all was silent around; and it seemed the hour, of all others, to sit and read, by the solitary lamp, the pouring forth of a high spirit long passed away from earth. She continued some time longer then; but, as she felt it growing late, she rose to seek her pillow, and only paused to look out from the window, the curtains of which were withdrawn, and gaze for a moment at the starlight sky. As she did so,

some sound from below, as of a person leaping the garden wall, made her look down, and she saw the figure of a man moving on the gravel walk. The next instant he stooped, rose again, and threw some small pebbles against her window, and the moment after, as she was drawing back in some alarm, she heard a voice pronounce her name.

There was something about the figure which reminded her of Mrs. Charlton's son; and yet it seemed very different too, but the voice was undoubtedly his; and she came nearer to the window again, and once more looked out. She had no longer any doubt. It was certainly Alfred Latimer, though, it seemed, in very strange attire; and as soon as, by the light in the room, he perceived that she was again at the window, he made signs to her to open it, which, after a momentary hesitation, she did.

"Louisa," he said, in a low voice—"Louisa, come down and open the 'door, there's a dear sister; I want to get in."

His tone and whole manner was agitated and wild; and Louisa replied, "I will call one of the servants, Alfred, and bid them let you in in a minute."

"On no account!" he exclaimed; "if you won't take the trouble to come down, and let me in yourself, say so at once, and I will go away again; but I wish no one to know that I am here to-night. Will you open it, or will you not?"



His tone was so sharp and menacing that Louisa felt some alarm, though she knew not well what injury he could do her if she did as he desired; but reflecting that the butler slept on the ground floor, at no great distance from the door, and that the bell-rope of a large bell, which would speedily alarm the whole house, hung close by, she replied at length, "Well, wait a moment, and I will come down, Alfred."

"And you will wake no one?" he said, in a tone which seemed to her mingled with apprehension.

"No," she replied; "if you do not wish it, I will not."

"There's a good girl," was the answer: "be quick, be quick, Louisa;" and, taking a candle from the table, she descended to the garden door, withdrew the chain, and unlocked it, still keeping near the bell; and then, turning the handle of the lock, drew it back.

The instant the door was opened Alfred Latimer came in, snatched the candle from her hand, and saying in a low tone, "That will do, that will do. Thank you, Louisa;" he walked straight up stairs.

Louisa stood confounded.

His face, usually florid, was as pale as death; his eyes were wild and haggard; his hand shook so that it could scarcely hold the candlestick; and his dress was no less strange than his manner. He had no hat on, and over his other clothing



was drawn a smock-frock, stained and dirty, and as Louisa watched him up stairs, she saw that the singular costume was completed by a pair of common leather leggings. She had no time to observe more; but with a suspicion that he had become deranged in intellect—an event which she had often dreaded, from his wild and irregular course of life, she returned to her room, and instantly locked the door. Not above two or three minutes passed ere some one turned the handle of the lock. Then came a knock; and, approaching the door, she inquired, “What is it? I cannot open the door now. I am going to bed.”

“Put down your ear to the keyhole, then,” said the voice of Alfred Latimer: and when she had done so, he added, in a stern tone, “Not a word to any one of my having been here, upon your life.” Thus saying he turned away, and she could hear him go down stairs, open and close the door, and go out.

## CHAPTER VI.

ALFRED LATIMER, on leaving his criminal accomplices, had turned away without reply, and hurried up the lane towards Mallington House. He paused not for an instant, for dread and anxiety were behind and drove him on ; but yet he could not go so fast that thought did not catch him. The scenes of his boyhood and his youth were all around him ; and in a few minutes the house, where all the brightest memories of early years were stored, rose before his eyes. "What had he not cast away ?" he asked himself, as he saw it standing out in the calm moonlight. "What had he not lost ? Peace, station, friends, esteem, perhaps life, were all gone. Fury, passion, dark remorse, haggard despair, were thenceforth to be the fell companions of his way, tearing his heart with their iron fangs as he went." Ere he could stop the reproachful voice from within, memory seemed in a moment to present to his eyes all that he had done amiss through life ; the waywardness

of boyhood, the obstinacy and violence of after years, the vices and follies of early manhood. Oh! how he wished that he had been different—that he had listened to warnings—endured reproof—followed good counsel—seized the opportunity of amendment whenever it was offered—repented ere it was too late.

Still, dread of detection, shame, punishment, were even stronger than despair; and, at a spot where he had often passed before on some wild frolic, he leaped the garden wall and approached the house.

The means that he employed to procure entrance have been already detailed; but between the time of his seeing Louisa at the window and of her coming down to give him admission, a dark and shameful scheme suggested itself to his mind, which he proceeded to put in execution. The fiend called Fear drives man but too frequently to darker crimes than any other passion, and as Alfred Latimer stood there by the door, he thought, "I will put these things in Morton's room. If they do suspect him, he will soon be able to prove himself innocent. It can be but a day or two in prison to him, and it might be death and destruction to me."

At that moment the door was opened, and he went in, hurrying past Louisa, as we have said, and seeking his own room in the first place, when he stripped off the attire in which he had come thither, and clothed himself in a fresh and

unstained dress. Then, after disposing of the money somewhat better about his person than he had done before, he gathered up the bloody clothes, tied them together, and, carrying them into Morton's room, put them cunningly away under the drawers. Crime never remembers every precaution, however, and in the trepidation and gloom of his mind he forgot more than one. But without pausing to do more than we have said, he hurried away, descended to Louisa's room, and held some conversation with her through the door, as we have before mentioned. Thence, descending to the hall, he issued out once again into the garden, whence, after walking through the shrubberies and leaping over the wall, he pursued his way to the common, where, at the appointed spot, he found his companions waiting with the horse and gig.

Williams had grown impatient, and was upon the very eve of setting off, when Alfred Latimer made his appearance. "Here, jump in," he cried. "There is room enough for us three, and it doesn't much signify if we break the horse's wind, for we must kill him, and break the gig to pieces, to prevent them telling tales of how we went. Maltby's to do the business with Levy, and has sworn upon his honour to send us the money when we tell him where, so you had better give him the rings and bracelets and stuff that you've got about you, for they only tell tales."

may have been used. Do you not remember I thought I heard a scream as we were walking from the park-keeper's cottage up to the Hall?"

"I do, I do," answered Dr. Western; "and though it may seem strange to say so, I would rather have it as you suppose than otherwise—I would rather have this poor Lucy injured in body than in spirit."

"I can understand you perfectly, my dear friend," replied Morton; "but in regard to Alfred Latimer, do not let us give way too much to prejudice. This Mrs. Wilson may, as I have said, be in error. She saw the person whom she suspects to have been him but for a moment. It was nearly dark when she met him; he has no good reputation with the country people any more than with ourselves; and the resemblance may have been fanciful entirely. This morning he was certainly ill in bed; and I think it will be best, while you return home and take measures for apprehending those who have committed this outrage, for me to walk up to the common, and ascertain whether he be really there or not. Till that is ascertained our dear Louisa had better not be informed of what has occurred, as it would only fill her with painful suspicions, which after all may be unfounded."

Dr. Western offered some opposition to his

young companion's plan, alleging that he might involve himself in a quarrel with Alfred Latimer, which might have very painful consequences. But Morton, sure of his own calmness and self-command, persisted in his design, and they walked on together towards the little town of Mallington, where all was calm and tranquil, the lights shining forth from the windows, and many of the inhabitants standing out before their doors, or strolling through the street to enjoy the sweet air of a night scarcely touched with the approach of autumn. The moon was rising large and round, as the two gentlemen crossed the bridge; and her light struggling with some clouds, as she ascended the arch of heaven, fell in patches of wavy silver upon the waters, and on the broad leaves of the water-lilies that here and there spread out from the banks; but neither Morton nor Dr. Western had any inclination to pause and gaze at a prospect which at another time they might have stayed long to contemplate. The heart of each felt too dark and gloomy for the beauty of the scene to find its way in; and hurrying on into Mallington, Morton left the worthy rector at the inn to summon the constables of the place, and take such other measures as were necessary for the restoration of Lucy Edmonds to her home, while he



himself walked on up the hill, and with a rapid pace bent his steps to the cottage of the Widow Brown. As he went he met several men returning from a work at a distance, and when the moon shone out so that they could see the general appearance of the gentleman whom they passed, they civilly gave him good-night, with that decent respect for superior station which was then general, and is not altogether extinguished in England; but the clouds still from time to time completely covered the fair planet, and even the sandy path from the high road to the cottage was then with difficulty to be distinguished.

At the door of Widow Brown's house, Morton knocked before he entered, and at first no answer was returned; but upon repeating the summons, the voice of the old woman herself was heard, in a harsh tone, exclaiming, "Come in! Why the devil do you stand knocking there?"

On Morton's entrance she seemed both surprised and annoyed, but changed her tone to a more civil one as she asked what was his pleasure.

"I wish to see Mr. Latimer, my good dame," replied Morton; "shall I find him in the next room?"

Mother Brown hesitated, and, probably, if she had possessed any means of preventing her

visitor from satisfying himself she would have said that the young gentleman was asleep. Certain it is that the lie first rose to her lips ; but remembering that she was alone, and could not stop Mr. Morton from going on into the adjoining room if he thought fit, she replied, "He has gone out upon the common, sir, to take a little walk in the moonlight. He thought it would do him good, poor gentleman."

With this confirmation of the suspicions which had been entertained against Mrs. Charlton's son, Morton did not think fit to ask any more questions, but merely answering, "Well, tell him I called to see him," he turned and left the cottage.

There had been a light within, and a cloud was just coming over the moon, the silvery edge resting half over her disc affording a gleam, which lasted but a moment, however, till the dark vapour swept across and cast its shadows upon the earth. During that moment Morton thought that he caught sight of a man's head and shoulders just rising above the edge of the neighbouring pit ; but he was not one easily to apprehend any danger, and he walked quietly on, merely noticing that the figure disappeared more suddenly than could be accounted for by the increased darkness produced by the cloud ;

for the brightness of the sky around afforded sufficient light to see, though indistinctly. Scarcely had he passed the spot, however, where the man's head and shoulders had appeared, when he heard a sound like gravel falling from the bank into the pit below, under the tread of some one springing up, and he was instinctively turning round towards the side whence the noise proceeded when he received a violent blow on the head which laid him stunned and bleeding on the ground.

## CHAPTER VI.

WE must look back for an hour or two, dear reader, to the period when about sunset a boat crossed the river from the Mallington side to the sedgy piece of ground which we have more than once alluded to.

The boat reached the shore, and was drawn into a little sort of muddy creek, where several large old willows hid it from observation. There, one of the two men which it contained jumped on shore; and the other laid his head upon the raised part of the stern, and seemed to dispose himself to sleep. The other—in whom it required an eye well acquainted with his person to recognise Alfred Latimer—walked on, till he reached the path. Thence, after looking round him for a minute or two, he crossed through the shrubs and underwood to the other footway. There he paused for some minutes, looking up the path with an impatient glance, and muttering

to himself with an oath, "Jack Williams is devilish late—I wonder what is keeping him. Hark! there's a step;" and hurrying through the trees again, he exclaimed, incautiously, "Is that you, Jack?"

The moment he beheld Dame Wilson, however, he withdrew before he thought she could notice him, and then listened for her retreating footfalls. He then turned along the path in the direction of the Hall, retrod his steps again, and was once more wheeling round, when, without having heard any one approach, he found Jack Williams by his side.

"Why, this isn't the place, Mr. Latimer," said Williams, in a low voice; "if you don't mind what you're about she will pass without your seeing her; quick, get through the trees, and look out on that other road."

"Come along, then," said Alfred Latimer, "I did not know which path it was upon."

"No, go yourself first," replied Williams, in the same quick manner; "try to persuade her, first, gently; I will be close at hand."

The young gentleman, following this counsel, crossed once more through the trees, while Williams hid himself in the brushwood and listened. Several minutes elapsed, however, before Lucy herself appeared, and Alfred Latimer

was beginning to think that she must have passed, when he suddenly caught sight of her, coming with faint and agitated steps along the side of the marsh. He instantly sprang forward to meet her; but, though joy at seeing him was upon poor Lucy's countenance, her first words were—"Oh! Mr. Latimer, I promised never to meet you again."

"You have done so by accident, Lucy," said Alfred Latimer, taking her hand, and pressing it in his; "they cannot blame you; and, indeed, if you had been wise, and loved me as I once thought you did, no one would have any right to blame you—for you would now be my wife."

"Oh, Alfred!" replied Lucy, looking up in his face with a reproachful glance, "you know too well"—but she did not finish the sentence, and he went on.

"You would have me believe that you do love me, Lucy," he said; "but how can I think so when, for a mere rash whim of your father's—a hatred of me without a cause—you not only make me miserable, but drive me to all sorts of rash things. See what your unkindness has already brought about. Have I not quarrelled with my mother, gone to London, half-ruined myself, and then, in coming down like a madman to seek you, because I was informed that your



father was going to marry you to another, have I not been dashed almost to pieces ? ”

Poor Lucy wept, but through her tears she answered, “ No, no, Alfred ; I will never marry another.”

“ Then be mine now, dearest Lucy,” replied Alfred Latimer, pressing her closer to him. “ We have now the opportunity. Do not let us lose it. And then my heart will be at rest, and no one can tease you any more to be another’s wife. I have a boat here which will carry us across the river in two minutes. Then I have got the pretty cottage for you that stands away at the back of the common, where you can be quiet and peaceable all night, and to-morrow we can go away to a distance and be married immediately—come, dear Lucy, come ! ”

“ Oh, no, no ! ” murmured Lucy Edmonds, striving to free herself from his arms as he would have drawn her towards the river side, “ I must not—I dare not, Alfred.”

“ What, when I have risen from a sick-bed to come and ask you at the risk of life ! ” exclaimed Alfred Latimer, impetuously. “ Is this love, Lucy ? Is this affection ? ”

“ You know I love you,” she answered, “ but my father—my mother—I cannot, I ought not—oh ! I do love you truly, but ”—

At that moment Williams appeared suddenly from amongst the trees, and though his touch was not rough as he took her by the arm, the surprise and terror of the moment, called a scream from her lips.

"Come, come, Miss Edmonds," he said, "there is no use of resisting—one can see well enough how your heart leads you, and it is too late to fight with it now. Mr. Latimer has promised to marry you, in my hearing, and he will keep his word. Do not keep us here till people come, and we get into a row, where some of us may lose our lives. Do kindly what you must do, and think what would befall if your father were to come up just now."

As he spoke he aided Latimer in drawing her along towards the boat, but his last words seemed to have more effect on Lucy Edmonds than anything else. Before, she had resisted, though but feebly; but at the thought of her father's appearance at that moment, and all the consequences that might ensue, she murmured, "Oh, Heaven forbid!" and looking wildly round, suffered them to lead her on without further opposition. In another minute she was seated in the punt, which was immediately pushed off by the man Brown, and was soon in the midst of the river. Supported by Alfred Latimer, she sat with her hands cover-

ing her eyes, and the tears streaming through her fingers as the boat glided over the chequered surface of the waters, now rippling in the moonlight, now shadowed by the clouds. It took but a minute or two to cross, and as soon as the punt touched the ground, and the man Brown had jumped out and moored it by the chain, Alfred Latimer carried rather than led the poor girl to the shore, and then endeavoured to support her trembling form upon his arm. But Lucy could hardly stand, and was still less able to walk, so that they were obliged to pause for a minute or two, nearly at the spot where Louisa Charlton had plunged in to save the unhappy girl's brother. They had not been long there when they heard the sound of voices from the other side. Lucy recognised her father's tones; but it was too late now she thought to hesitate or to resist. The die was cast; her fate for weal or woe was sealed, and the voice which had once been so pleasant to her ear, now brought nothing but terror; yet it was the terror which gives strength, and not which overpowers, and with a great effort she said, "I can go! I can go! Oh, Heaven! do not let them find us."

With her lover supporting her on one side, and Williams on the other, while the man Brown followed lest his aid should be needed, Lucy

advanced along the road which led towards the back of the common, with her heart beating fearfully and her breath coming short. At length she paused for a while, saying, "A moment, Alfred!—a moment! I will go on again in a moment!"

They all stopped in silence; and, as they waited, the gay sound of village mirth reached them from Mallington.

Oh, how sad it came upon poor Lucy's ear!—It seemed to tell her, with a prophetic voice, that the light laugh, the joyous merriment, was no more to be her portion upon earth; that she was given over to heart-sinking despondency, to self-reproach and sadness; that the peace and the pleasure, the calm night, the contented day, the spirit at rest, and the bosom without care, were all gone for ever! But there is something even in such dark and powerful convictions which gives a vigour, though it be the vigour of despair. She was anxious to fly from all sounds that she had loved, for they seemed to ring the knell of departed days; and saying in a low tone, "Now, Alfred, I can go," she resumed her way up the hill.

The walk was a long one, for the cottage which Williams had hired for Alfred Latimer was at least two miles distant from Mallington; but Lucy Edmonds stopped no more.

At length the cottage door was reached, but the windows were all dark and cheerless. There was no light within any more than in her own heart; and though the leaves of the woodbine and the rose climbed over the little trellised porch, and reached their fibres up to the thatch, they seemed like nightshade to poor Lucy Edmonds, as she waited while Williams drew the key from his pocket and opened the door. He had caused everything to be prepared, however, with some care and neatness. Candles stood upon the table, which were soon lighted, showing a neatly furnished room, and various provisions upon the shelves and tables around. But Lucy marked none of these things. It was of leaving her father's house she thought; of disobeying his command; of never seeing his face again; of being no longer pressed to her mother's bosom; of the breaking of all the fond ties of youth; of the loss of all the dear affections of early days: and when she looked around all seemed desolation.

Alfred Latimer led her to a chair, and seated her with her hand in his; but Williams, approaching one of the shelves, took down a bottle of wine, and pouring some out into a glass gave it to her, saying, in the kindly tone which sailors generally use to the weak and young, "Come, take that, Miss Edmonds; you are tired and faint. It will



be all well in a day or two ; and then, when you are his wife, your father will forget and forgive, and see things very differently. Come, don't vex yourself ; for you may be very happy if you like."

Lucy took the wine and drank it. She would have done anything that they bade her ; but the moment after, though the hopes that Williams presented to her mind cheered her for an instant, the voice of the man Brown, who had just entered, made her start, and turn round with terror.

" I shouldn't mind a glass, too," he said ; " for it's a long walk. Come, pour us out some, Jack," and his words and his appearance brought a new source of apprehension into Lucy's mind. What were these comrades of the man she loved ? Who were these familiar friends with whom he consorted ? Were these the companions of the son of a high race ? Were these the persons he trusted and esteemed ?

Williams, however, answered nothing to the ruffian's speech, but spoke eagerly for a few minutes in a low voice to Alfred Latimer, urging him apparently to some course which he did not think fit to pursue. " Well," he said at length, " you are not right—but we had better go. Only remember your promise, Mr. Latimer. Come, Brown," and Lucy Edmonds was left alone with Alfred Latimer.



Williams and his companion, Brown, then mounted the little bank under which the cottage lay, and came upon the common above. There was a small public-house at the distance of about a quarter of a mile, at the door of which Brown stopped, declaring that, as he had been bilked of his wine, the other should treat him to a glass of spirits; and, going in, he tossed off more than half a pint of the liquid fire, which is but too readily to be found in such places. He was inclined to stop and gossip with some loose characters whom they found in the parlour; but the superior ruffian with whom he was associated for the time, forced him out, and took the way with him towards his mother's hut. The man had been drinking before, and the spirits he had taken had some effect, not in inebriating, but in raising his dull nature into something approaching a brutal sort of energy.

"Hang me!" he said, as they walked along, "if I should not like to have a spree of some kind to-night. I wish it was the pheasant season, I would clear out Master Edmonds' covers for him while he's piping after his daughter."

"Go home, and go to bed, you fool," said Williams in a surly tone. "When you do anything of that kind, have your head clear, and don't go drinking and then talking as loud as a babbling old woman in a passion."

The other man felt his own inferiority sufficiently to be silent, though he was not very well pleased with his companion's words; and thus they proceeded till they came to the clump of old fir-trees, about a couple of hundred yards distant from mother Brown's dwelling, where her son caught hold of Williams's arm, saying in a lower tone than he had used before, "D—n me, if there isn't somebody walking up to the house! If it's some one come after young Latimer, this job will all be blown."

"Some of the servants, I dare say," replied Williams, looking towards the house. "I hope your mother won't be fool enough to say he's out."

"Why, what would you have her say?" asked her son.

"Can't she say he's asleep?" rejoined Williams; but just then, a gleam of moonlight passing over the figure they had seen, he added, "It doesn't look like a servant either."

"I know who it is," said Tom Brown; "d—n him he is always meddling, and I'll break his head some day."

"If you mean Gibbs, you are mistaken, Tom," replied Williams.

"I know what I mean," rejoined the other in a mysterious tone; "and, if that fellow finds that

might meet with next. They paused for an instant; but then the boy passed them all, crying, "Oh, my father! I wonder what they have done to father."

"Come along," cried Blackmore; "open some of the windows as we go, Ned. One of you fellows run and let the women out."

But, notwithstanding this desire, there were busy feelings amongst them that kept them all together. The silence, the darkness of the house, had something terrible in it; but still they went on, opening the windows as they passed, till they reached the hall, where Blackmore paused; but the boy, becoming more and more terrified in regard to his father every moment, exclaimed, "This way, this way, Blackmore. He used to sleep in the room up here."

"Stay a minute, my dear," said the gardener, laying his hand upon young Edmonds's head. "Tom, you come on with me; better let the men go on first, my dear," and walking forward with sad misgivings in his heart, he opened the door of poor Edmonds's room. The passage was obscure, the windows were closed, and the interior was quite dark; but there was no sound, and the old gardener, advancing cautiously, opened the shutters. "My God!" cried one of the men who was behind him, and, turning quickly round, the old gardener saw the floor covered with blood, and the dead body of his good friend lying on

the bed. The four men gathered round, and it was long before any one ventured to speak; but in the midst of the deep silence a loud and wailing cry burst from behind them, and Blackmore, turning, threw his arms round the poor boy, while the tears dropped heavily from his own eyes.

"Better go away, my dear, better go away," he said. "Here, Ned, take him down to my cottage. Don't let him go home just yet. I'll go to your mother, and comfort her as well as I can. Go away, there's a good boy; this is no sight for you."

The boy was quite passive in their hands, and, taking him by the arm, the under gardener led him away, while Blackmore whispered, "As soon as you have taken him to my wife, run over and fetch Dr. Western. You had better get the constable, too, and send word to the other magistrates."

"Shall I bring the surgeon?" asked the man, as he was going out of the door. But Blackmore took up poor Edmonds's hand, let it drop again stiff and cold upon the bed, and shook his head mournfully.

"You may as well, however," he said; "the poor widow may want him."

They then proceeded to examine the house, and to release the two women who were shut up above. The object and proceedings of the robbers, as far as any traces of them remained, were soon discovered. Edmonds's gun was found in

the housekeeper's room; and as the door leading into the yard had been locked the night before, it was clear that the lock had been picked, and entrance effected by that means. The whole party immediately applied themselves to look for foot-steps, and, though they were somewhat puzzled by their own, which crossed the yard in a direct line, they found a number of others both going and coming.

"Here are three sizes, clear enough," said Blackmore. "Take care, don't tread amongst them. This is a very big one, and here's one a little less, and then a small one, not much bigger than a woman's. Let us leave them till the magistrates come. I dare say we shall be able to trace them out in the park, for they must have crossed the road somewhere, and the gravel is soft."

Following his advice, they returned into the house, and endeavoured to ascertain from the two women the appearance of the men they had seen; but terror had very much troubled the vision of Mrs. Chalke and her companion; and though the description they gave somewhat resembled Brown, the picture they painted was anything but like Williams. They both agreed, however, that one was much taller than the other.

"There must have been three of them at least, Mrs. Chalke," said Blackmore.

"We only saw two," answered the housekeeper.



“Ay, but I am sure I saw a man’s head at the end of the passage,” exclaimed the housemaid.

“And I thought I heard people speaking below as they dragged me along,” said Mrs. Chalke.

Not long after two or three people came hurrying up from Mallington, the news having been spread by the under gardener as he went down. No magistrates appeared ; but at length the constable came, full of bustle and importance, in a case which he thought worthy of his genius. From him it was first learned that Dr. Western was absent from Mallington, and that Mr. Middleton had been sent for ; and in about half an hour after that gentleman was seen galloping across the park. By this time the place was full of people, half the village having turned out as the news had been diffused from house to house ; and it was with great difficulty that Blackmore and the constable could prevent them from running all over Mallington Hall before the magistrates arrived. Miss Mathilda Martin, who was amongst the first, had nearly forced her way over all impediments, and got into a serious dispute with Blackmore, when he stopped her, by gently insinuating in the heat of the moment, that she dared say he had something to do with it himself, or he wouldn’t try to prevent people from seeing with their own eyes. As soon as Mr. Middleton appeared she was the first to attack him, approaching with an air of great familiarity and consequence, and shaking her head ruefully.



"Ah, sir!" she said, "I knew what would happen. I told you so. When such people are suffered to be about a place, there is sure to be some mischief. He was not always hanging about here for nothing. He might have murdered us all in our beds, the bloody-minded villain."

"There, get out of the way," cried Harry Soames roughly, "and let his worship come in and examine. You had better go home and measure out your ribands, Miss Martin. This is no place for gossiping women."

The fair Mathilda was exceeding wroth; but she knew that it would not do to quarrel with the constable, and therefore governed her anger. In the mean while Mr. Middleton, under the guidance of Harry Soames, proceeded, step by step, to examine into the whole affair, and then, without expressing any opinion, asked for pen and ink, saying, "We had better wait for Sir Simon Upplestone; but, in the mean time, I will send a note to Mrs. Charlton."

The pen and ink were soon procured, and, sitting down at a table in the library, Mr. Middleton began to write the note he spoke of, while Harry Soames stood scratching his head before him, and looking wondrous wise. At first the magistrate did not remark him; or at least did not observe the peculiar expression of his countenance, for there was an immense gabble in the adjacent rooms; but immediately after, raising his eyes in search of a thought, of which he himself had not

many to spare, he suddenly perceived the constable, and the constable's look. Now Mr. Middleton was a man who, though of a decided tone, was not naturally of a decided character, and though he often led others who were a step weaker, still he was always led himself when he came in contact with any one stronger in mind. With such sort of people there is nothing so embarrassing as a doubtful expression, of countenance. I have seen a whole congregation of strong resolutions put to flight in a moment by a shake of the head and an elevation of the eyebrows, and a shrug of the shoulders has discomfited many a grave purpose. Oratory may be combated, arguments refuted; but a look of doubt and admonition slightly tinged with a little pity is so intangible, expresses so many things more than the eloquence of Cicero or Demosthenes could ever have found voice to utter, that it is perfectly irrefragable, and Mr. Middleton, laying down the pen, demanded, "What's the matter, Soames?" Now he had a great respect for Soames's opinion.

"Why, please your worship, I was thinking that you might be writing about Mr. Morton," replied the constable.

"Well, so I was, Soames," answered the magistrate. "What of that?"

"Don't you think, your worship," he replied, just as the magistrate, having signed, was sealing the note,— "don't you think, sir, that while you are

pursuing this game the real sort may get off. Now, I happen to know that Jack Williams was over here yesterday, and I saw Bill Maltby hanging about in the lanes down by the river as late as twelve o'clock at night."

"Why did you not execute your warrant against Williams, then?" demanded the magistrate.

"Because I couldn't catch him," answered the constable; "I was out after him when I saw Maltby."

"Then Maltby must be taken into custody," said Mr. Middleton abruptly; and at the same moment Sir Simon Upplestone, booted and spurred, strode into the library.

"There," said Mr. Middleton, handing the note to Soames, "let that be sent to Mrs. Charlton as fast as it can go, and you yourself see if you can get hold of Maltby, and let him be brought here on suspicion."

Harry Soames took the note, with the intention of delivering it himself; but it may be as well to remark that by this time it was past ten o'clock, and the distance between the Hall and Mallington House was not far short of two miles.

## CHAPTER IX.

WITHOUT pursuing the course of Mr. Soames, the constable, which, to say the truth, was somewhat circuitous,—for he thought fit to secure the person of Mr. William Maltby, in the first instance, before he delivered the note at Mrs. Charlton's,—we must proceed to Mallington House, and see what its inmates were about from an early hour in the morning. Mrs. Charlton this morning was in a much more placable mood—at least to all appearance—with everybody and everything. She was as civil as possible to Mrs. Windsor herself, who waited upon her, to speak about household affairs, while she was dressing; and the shrewd housekeeper said to herself, “Now she’s going to execute her grand scheme, if Mr. Morton comes back, and that I don’t doubt he will do before the day’s over, from all I see and hear. I wish I could get speech of him for five minutes. If not, I must talk to Miss Louisa, and let her know all about it; otherwise, she’ll take them both in, for she’s as cunning as the black gentleman.”

Having got her orders, however, Mrs. Windsor retired with a low courtesy, while Mrs. Charlton thought to herself, in reference to that personage, "She's as smooth as a piece of marble. As soon as this is all settled, I'll pay her her wages, and send her packing."

Shortly after, Mrs. Charlton proceeded to the drawing-room, where she found Louisa already up, but looking somewhat pale and sad. "Come, Louisa, my love," said the excellent lady, "do not be melancholy and anxious, I'm sure Mr. Morton is quite safe. Indeed, I had an intimation last night that such is the case, from good Mr. Nethersole, who heard it at Dr. Western's from Mrs. Evelyn—nay, there's no use of colouring, you naughty girl. You did not suppose my eyes were blind all this time, did you?"

Had there been esteem, respect, or affection, Louisa would have cast herself upon Mrs. Charlton's breast, and given way to grateful tears; but as there was neither she repressed them.

"Ma'am, the housemaid wants to speak to you," said a footman at the door; and Mrs. Charlton, wondering what a housemaid could wish to say to her, quitted the room.

After reflecting for a few minutes, not without both doubt and wonder, upon her step-mother's conduct on the present occasion, Louisa took up a book to divert her thoughts, and a minute

or two after the great bell of the door rang. A step then sounded upon the stairs, which made Louisa's heart palpitate; Mrs. Charlton's voice was heard welcoming somebody; and in another moment that lady and Mr. Morton entered the room together. Mrs. Charlton's face was all radiant with the brightest and best arranged smiles possible; and Morton advancing towards Louisa at once, with very little restraint upon the feelings of his heart, took her hand in his, and pressed his lips upon it.

"Come, no explanations now," said Mrs. Charlton, "we'll have breakfast first, for I am very hungry; and then, my love, our young friend and myself will have a conference upon matters of importance. After that we will do anything you like."

With an easy grace, which bespoke the utmost composure, Mrs. Charlton led the way to the breakfast-room, leaving a sufficient space between herself on the one part, and Mr. Morton and Louisa on the other, to afford the lovers a few moments of private conversation as they descended the stairs. The whole evolution was performed very neatly, Mrs. Charlton speaking near the door, and then immediately taking her departure, so that it was impossible for Morton to be civil enough to attend at her side. Not the most discreet chaperon could have done it better. When, however, tea was made and coffee brought in, conversation became general, and naturally



turned to the causes of the visitor's unexplained absence.

It was a somewhat difficult subject to deal with; but Morton generalized as much as possible, stating, indeed, the facts of his strange abduction, but withholding the names of the parties concerned in it. Mrs. Charlton, however, was not to be so satisfied, and inquired at once, first, whether Mr. Morton knew the persons implicated in so gross an outrage? and, next, what were their names?

"My dear madam," replied her guest, "my worthy solicitor, who was the first to come to my rescue, advises a prosecution, and says that some of the parties might be transported; but as I am very much disinclined to such harsh measures, I think it will be better perhaps not to mention any names till, after due deliberation, I have made up my mind to my course."

Mrs. Charlton merely replied, "Oh! very well," and breakfast proceeded.

When that important avocation was at an end, a slight and only momentary tremor seemed to affect the lady of the house; but immediately after she rose, saying, in a clear sweet voice, "Now, my dear sir, I wish to speak with you for a few minutes; and, if you please, we will go into the library."

Mr. Morton, of course, acceded; and Mrs. Charlton and her visitor proceeded through the doors on the left, and were soon seated in the

library. A short pause ensued; but Morton, perversely, would not break silence first, and at length Mrs. Charlton commenced with a gay, short, merry laugh.

"Well, Mr. Morton," she said, "this is, perhaps, almost ridiculous to speak about; but yet I feel myself called upon to say something about our dear Louisa. You must feel that this cannot go on further without some definite understanding between us upon the subject. Not, indeed, that I imagine you to be a man to trifle with any woman's affections; but people will make observations. In a word, then, you love Louisa—is it not so?"

"Most sincerely and devotedly, my dear madam," replied Morton. "I say at once I seek her hand, and am ready immediately to enter into explanations with both her guardians upon the subject."

This was not quite the reply that Mrs. Charlton desired. She had expected to hear of difficulties—to receive some excuses for presuming to address a young lady of considerable wealth without equal advantages. She had thought it would be so; several things that she had seen, as well as the report of others, had made her imagine it, but yet her confidence in that result had been somewhat shaken by other circumstances. Nevertheless, she had a reserve which she fancied quite secure. If Morton was not seeking Louisa for her wealth, he was evidently deeply attached

to her ; and she argued, if it be her money that is his object, she has enough to make part a bait sufficiently tempting ; if it be herself, the loss of a portion will be nothing in his estimation.

After a moment's pause, then, she answered, "Nay, my dear sir, I too must claim some say in the matter. In the first place as a mother—and I am sure I regard Louisa with the affection of one—and, in the next place, as one especially appointed by her dear father, the best and kindest man that ever lived"—and Mrs. Charlton took out a fine cambric handkerchief, embroidered in the corners—"appointed by her father, I say, to watch over her settlement in life. Perhaps you are not aware, Mr. Morton, that, by her father's will, my consent is absolutely necessary to her marriage, and, therefore, I am her guardian as far as that great step in a woman's life is concerned."

"My dear madam," replied Morton, "I have been fully made aware of the terms of Mr. Charlton's will,"—

"Good!" thought Mrs. Charlton, "he has inquired into the matter. It is her fortune he seeks, and he is prepared to act like a man of sense."

But Mr. Morton proceeded, "I am quite ready to give every explanation to yourself, if you think fit ; but first,"—

"Oh! yes," said Mrs. Charlton, interrupting him, "it may first be necessary, as you say, to

explain all the circumstances of the case ; for, of course, they do not exactly appear upon the face of the will ; and, indeed, I have always felt that, in consequence of Mr. Charlton not stating his intentions clearly in that document, I am placed in a very delicate and unpleasant position. It luckily happens now, however, that I have to deal with a man of high feeling and honour, who will understand my situation at once, and thus the task will be less difficult. It had better be undertaken at once, therefore ; and thus the case stands : Mr. Charlton and I had often talked over dear Louisa's prospects ; and though he was at one time somewhat inclined—out of regard for me I believe—that a marriage should take place between her and my son Alfred, I represented to him that the poor boy was in no degree fitted to make her happy, and induced him to put such a bar against it, that it could never be thought of. He then, as you know, made his will, leaving all his property to Louisa, with my full consent and approbation ; but, at the same time, he said to me, ‘ My dearest Emily, while Louisa remains with you, united as you are by the strongest ties of affection, there will be quite enough to maintain your household in the style in which you are accustomed to live ; but it is my intention to render your consent to her marriage indispensable, both for her own sake and yours, in order that if she chooses to marry, which, perhaps, may not be the case, you

may be secured such a share in what I leave as will compensate to you for her seeking another home.' ”

Mrs. Charlton paused, and looked at Mr. Morton; but that gentleman sat with his fine eyes bent upon the ground, without any movement of lip, nostril, or eyebrow indicating what was passing in his mind; and she then went on in an easy natural tone, saying, “I argued against this arrangement; but he still adhered to it, though it was shaken before he died, but that lamentable event was so sudden that he had not time to make the better arrangements which I believe he proposed, and, therefore, of course, we must abide by those that exist.”

“Certainly, my dear madam,” replied Morton, “and may I now ask what it is that you think those arrangements imply?”

Now was the tug of war. It was the most important event of all those campaigns which Mrs. Charlton had carried on against the poverty in which she was originally born. She had hitherto been a very successful general, but this was her Waterloo, and she felt all the weight of the occasion. Nevertheless she would not, by the pause of one moment, suffer Mr. Morton to see that she was calculating. It was her wish to impress him with the idea that all had been settled long before, between her and Mr. Charlton, and she replied in an instant,—“My dear husband’s wish was, that, if Louisa married



such an arrangement should be made to secure to me one-half of the property, for which reason he placed the whole at my disposal if she married without my consent."

Morton had well nigh laughed. The murder was out, the whole scheme developed; but he restrained himself, and demanded, "Pray, my dear madam, is there any memorandum of this intention of Mr. Charlton's, any document by which the matter may be defined?"

"No, sir, no!" answered the lady, beginning to grow angry at his coolness, and her cheek becoming somewhat flushed with a vague perception that he saw through her; "there is no memorandum—there is no document. But, surely, Mr. Morton," she added, in a less sharp tone, "you can trust to my word?"

"Oh! undoubtedly," replied Morton; "but it would be much more satisfactory to me, my dear lady, to have something tangible to satisfy certain principles which I have within the last three days announced so distinctly, that I fear I could not retreat from them without such written proofs of Mr. Charlton's intentions."

The lady was in a state of high consternation and anger. She had expected no such opposition; but what could she do? Her own case was urgent; money she must have; she had always calculated upon having it; and even delay would be ruinous. In these circumstances she lost her usual caution, exposing her game more



and more. "Such as I have stated were Mr. Charlton's intentions," she replied; "but I do not say, Mr. Morton, that I am by any means disposed to exact the complete fulfilment of his wishes. A third of the property, fairly estimated, is all that I expect; but that I think I have a right to demand."

"My dear madam," replied Morton, in the same quiet tone, "according to your own showing, you have a right to demand half; and all I require is, that the fact of Mr. Charlton's intentions should be so clearly shown as to justify me in acceding—having, as I said, within these three days, distinctly expressed an opinion on the subject which I cannot retract."

"Within these three days!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, her cheek growing very red, "to whom, sir—who has a right to meddle with these matters but myself?"

"To your own son, my dear madam," answered her companion. "It is now necessary to inform you that Mr. Alfred Latimer, with a gang of not very respectable gentlemen whom he employed, was the person to carry me off from Mallington, and that his object was to drive a bargain with me to pay him certain thousand pounds on my marriage with Miss Charlton. He also hinted that you would have something of this kind to propose; but I told him distinctly, and at once, that I would never make a matter of merchandise of Miss Charlton's hand, nor be a party to any such

transaction; that I would wed her with all that her father left her, or with none, and therefore,"—

"Then, then"—cried Mrs. Charlton, with fury flashing from her eyes; but before she could finish the sentence, Wilkinson, the footman, entered the room with a note upon a salver, saying, "Soames, the constable, brought this, ma'am, and he is waiting to see you."

Mrs. Charlton took the note, and was twisting it round her fingers; but the man added: "He says it's very immediate, ma'am, and very important."

His mistress tore it open, and read. At the first words a malicious and triumphant smile crossed her angry countenance, and at the end she rose and hurried out of the room; while Morton, supposing their conference ended, passed through the side door into the breakfast-room in search of Louisa.

## CHAPTER X.

"CAN you tell me where I shall find Miss Charlton?" demanded Morton, as he entered the dining-room, and saw Mrs. Windsor's head looking in at the opposite door.

"She is in the little drawing-room, sir," answered the housekeeper; "but I was looking for you, sir—I beg pardon for the liberty. I have something very particular to say to you, if you would be good enough to allow me five minutes' conversation."

"Very willingly, Mrs. Windsor," answered Morton, moving towards the door, "but I fear if you desire any conversation with me, you must come down to the inn, as, in consequence of something that has just passed, I do not propose to trespass upon Mrs. Charlton's hospitality any longer. At present I must speak with Miss Charlton immediately."

"I guess what has passed, sir," answered Mrs. Windsor, with a grave face, "and wish I could have spoken to you before, as it was just about that I desired to say a word or two, for Mrs. Charlton has in reality no more power over Miss

Louisa, or her fortune either, than I have; and I do not like to see my poor young lady made unhappy. But by-and-by will do, if, as I suppose, you have refused her terms."

Morton was not a little surprised at the amount of knowledge Mrs. Windsor had obtained. But that was not a moment to find out a puzzle, and therefore merely saying, "I have," he began ascending the stairs.

"Pray hold firm, sir," exclaimed Mrs. Windsor, "for she has no power at all, as I will show you, whenever you have a moment's leisure;" and thus saying, she dropped a respectable courtesy, and retired.

Morton, on his part, hurried on, and at once entered the little drawing-room, where he found his fair Louisa gazing out of the window, with a look of deep and anxious thought. She sprang to meet him, however, as soon as she saw him, and we must forgive Morton if he took one embrace, ay, and one kiss.

"Listen, dearest," he said, "for we may be interrupted in a moment—I shall have to leave this house very soon. She wishes to make a matter of merchandise of your hand. I will consent to no such thing. It shall never be said I bought my Louisa. She has, she says, and so says your poor father's will, the power of depriving you of all he left, if you marry without her consent, and for that consent she demands half your property. So be it—Louisa is to me a

treasure which makes all other wealth valueless. I can settle upon you enough to compensate for what you lose. Will you, dear one—will you make this sacrifice for me; and be mine even at the risk of forfeiting all that is now your own?"

"Oh, Morton!" cried Louisa, sadly, "it is you that will lose what you had a right to expect."

"I win all that I desire if I win you, Louisa," answered Morton. "Do you consent?—Will you be mine at any risk?"

"At any, at every risk, I will," replied Louisa, "and try to compensate, by my love and gratitude, for such noble conduct. But what must I do, Morton, if"—

"Go down as soon as possible to Dr. Western's," answered Morton, before she could finish her question. "Take up your abode with him and Mrs. Evelyn till you can be mine. He is your guardian, and his house is your proper place of refuge, dearest—some one is coming. Will you promise me to do so?"

"I will, Edmond," she said, "I will; nothing shall stop me."

Almost as she spoke Mrs. Charlton entered the room; but the expression of that lady's countenance was so peculiar that it deserves a word or two for itself. There was still a touch of anger about it, but subdued and quieted, while a slight smile mingled an air of triumph with the bitterness of the expression, as if she had suddenly gained some advantage over an enemy. Her

tone, too, when she spoke was cold and decided, though with an affectation of perfect ease, which showed the effect a little too plainly.

“So,” she said somewhat sarcastically, “you are consulting about it. Have you made up your minds yet?”

“You are mistaken, my dear madam,” answered Morton; “we are not consulting upon it at all, and as to my mind, it is perfectly made up.”

“Well, I have been thinking of other things,” said Mrs. Charlton, “and we can talk of that afterwards, should it be necessary. Pray be seated, Mr. Morton. You have heard, I suppose, what has happened in our neighbourhood?”

“No, indeed,” answered her guest; “I have heard of nothing extraordinary, except what has happened to myself, within this last two or three days.”

The words would bear two interpretations, and consequently Mrs. Charlton immediately contrived to think that Morton referred to her own conduct towards him. “Oh! yes,” she answered, “there has been something both very extraordinary and very horrible happened last night. I thought you must have known it—Mallington Hall was broken into, the door of the plate room forced open, and everything it contained carried off.”

Morton was considerably moved. His brow contracted, his cheek got a little heated, and his eye flashed. “This is too bad,” he cried, “this is really too bad.”



“It is indeed,” answered Mrs. Charlton coolly; “but that is not all. The worst yet remains to be told. However, the villains are not likely to escape. They are pretty well known, I am told, and means have been taken for their immediate apprehension.”

“I am very glad to hear it,” answered Morton; “for the various outrages that have lately taken place in this neighbourhood show that there are some desperate characters down here.”

“Quite right, my dear sir—quite right,” replied Mrs. Charlton, keeping her eye fixed upon his face. “The principal person suspected is a certain lawyer’s clerk, who robbed his employer some time ago and absconded. There have been bills stuck up all about the place regarding him. Have you seen them, Mr. Morton?”

“Oh!—about that unfortunate fellow, Wilkins,” replied the gentleman to whom she spoke. “But if he be suspected of a robbery last night an error has been committed, as I happen to know that he was not in this neighbourhood.”

“Are you acquainted with him, then, Mr. Morton?” demanded the lady, in the quietest possible tone.

“I have seen him several times at Mr. Quatterly’s,” answered Morton, carelessly; “but I know that he could not have done this that is attributed to him, as he was not here.”

“Oh! then, you know Mr. Quatterly?” rejoined the lady, with a smile.

“Extremely well,” was Morton’s reply; though he began to be a little surprised at Mrs. Charlton’s tone. “Mr. Quatterly is my own solicitor, and the money stolen happened to be my own.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed Mrs. Charlton. “Then it has not reached you.”

“Oh! yes, it has,” answered Morton. “Mr. Quatterly, of course, made it good to me.”

“Ahem!” said the lady; but Louisa—who by long and sad experience knew more of her step-dame than Morton did—saw very well that there was something kept back, which she expected to produce at last with great effect, and she demanded, “What is there more? You said that the worst remained to be told.”

“Yes, indeed!” answered Mrs. Charlton; “the worst does remain to be told, and a horrible story it is. It seems that an attempt was made upon the house some time ago; and that ever since poor Edmonds, the park-keeper—as good a creature as ever lived—You know him, Mr. Morton, I think, for you ’ve often been seen talking with him, they tell me?”

“I know him very well, madam,” answered Morton; “a highly respectable and honest man. What of him?”

Mrs. Charlton paused for a moment, with a somewhat puzzled look; but then she answered, “Ever since that last attempt, it seems poor Edmonds has slept in the house to protect it. The villains, whoever they were, must have

known all the rooms and passages—and it is a difficult house, too—so they could have been no common burglars. However, they made their way in by picking the lock of a back door; and what were all their proceedings within, we, of course, cannot tell; but the result is now clear enough.”

She paused again; and it was evident, both to Morton and to Louisa, that for some purpose of her own she was drawing her story out to as great a length as possible. Morton, however, anxious to get at the facts, inquired eagerly, “But what was that result, my dear madam? It is that we principally desire to hear.”

“Why, that poor Edmonds was murdered,” answered Mrs. Charlton. “He was found lying on his bed, shot through the head.”

Both Louisa and her lover turned as pale as death. “Good God!” exclaimed Morton, starting up, “I must go down and see about it. This is horrible, indeed!”

“Stay a moment, Mr. Morton,” said Mrs. Charlton; “we have, you know, some business to settle, and as I hate talking frequently upon disagreeable subjects, we had better settle it at once.”

“As far as I am concerned,” answered Morton, abruptly, “the whole business is settled already I think you could not mistake my meaning, my dear lady.”

“Yet a moment,” said the mistress of the house,

beckoning him towards a window. "Louisa, you need not go; this business concerns you, too. Mr. Morton, you are in a dangerous situation, which will become more or less so according to your conduct to me."

"My dear madam, you are pleased to be enigmatical," answered Morton, indignation beginning to master him. "Will you have the goodness to explain yourself clearly, for, standing here comfortably in the drawing-room of Mallington House, I do not see how I can be in a dangerous situation at all."

Mrs. Charlton's fair round cheek flushed, and she answered, "I will explain myself clearly. It is supposed, my dear sir, that the name you have been pleased to assume in this place is not your real one." A slight smile came over Morton's face, and the lady went on, "I see I am right; but it is moreover suspected—mind, I don't say that it is so—that your name is more like Wilkins than Morton. Do you deny it?"

Morton paused for an instant, and then answered coolly, giving a gay glance of his eye to Louisa as he did so, "Perhaps it is, my dear madam."

Louisa, sad and distressed as she was, could not refrain from a smile; and Mrs. Charlton thought, as she observed the whole, "Then she has known it all the time. 'Pon my word, this is too bad! What creatures girls are in these days!"

She then went on aloud, however, to say, "This

is not all, Mr. Morton, or Mr. Wilkins—you are strongly suspected of having some share in this dark deed at Mallington Hall.—Mind, I don't say that it is so, but I tell you that I have the power of confirming those suspicions in a very strange manner." She spoke sternly and resolutely, fixing her eye upon him as if she would have searched his soul.

"Pooh, pooh!" exclaimed Morton, with his lip curling. "This is carrying the matter too far."

"Well, sir," said Mrs. Charlton, pointing with her finger through the window down the hill, up which was seen coming at considerable speed a gentleman on horseback, followed by a servant. "You have two minutes to decide upon what I propose to you, and not more. What do you say?"

"Exactly what I said before," answered Morton, coolly; "and allow me to add, madam, that Mrs. Charlton does not raise herself in my opinion by being ready, for a sum of money, to give the hand of her husband's daughter to a man whom she believes to be a swindler, and suspects of being a murderer."

"I will have revenge, at least," muttered Mrs. Charlton; and then, raising her voice, she exclaimed, "Soames, Soames! come in."

Louisa had been gazing down upon the carpet as if she had been studying the gay flowers with which it was covered; but suddenly a look of horror and consternation, deep and intense, over-



spread her countenance, as if some startling and dreadful fact had suddenly presented itself to her mind, and starting forward, she caught Mrs. Charlton's arm, exclaiming, "Stay, stay—for Heaven's sake stay! you do not know what you are doing. You are destroying yourself."

But as she spoke the constable entered the room, and Mrs. Charlton cried at once, "Take him in charge, Soames."

"What is the matter, dearest Louisa?" asked Morton in a tone of surprise. "You cannot suppose for a moment"—

"Oh, no, no!" cried Louisa wringing her hands; "but I fear she will bring down destruction on her own head."

"I am the best judge of my own acts, Miss Charlton," said the lady. "Take him in charge, Soames. He owns that his name is Wilkins, and not Morton."

"No, no, no!" exclaimed Morton, laughing. "Not exactly that, as Miss Charlton can bear witness. I said, more like it. This is a very serious business; and yet, pushed to this extremity, I cannot but feel that it becomes in some degree a jest."

"You will find it no jest, I suspect," replied Mrs. Charlton, not a little puzzled by Mr. Morton's demeanour, and only the more angry from a vague apprehension that she had suffered rage to carry her beyond the bounds of prudence; "however, the matter is not in my hands now. Louisa, you



may as well retire, for Mr. Middleton must be already at the door, and the examination of this person will probably be proceeded with here. Such scenes are not fit for young ladies."

"You will excuse me, madam," replied Louisa. "I shall certainly remain here. No place can be more fit for me than by the side of my future husband, when a false, I might call it a ridiculous accusation is brought against him."

"Oh, ho! so bold!" said Mrs. Charlton; "but I have understood you long, young lady. Nevertheless, it is as well, perhaps, that you should stay to witness what takes place regarding the man of your choice."

"There can be nothing to witness, madam, that I am afraid of," replied Louisa; but even while she was speaking, the door opened and Mr. Middleton was announced. The constable had been talking for a moment to Mr. Morton, and, as soon as the magistrate had entered the room, he spoke a few words to the servant in a low tone, to which the man replied, "I'll send down directly." Harry Soames nodded his head, and then returned quickly to the side of Mr. Morton, towards whom he seemed inclined to testify every sort of respect.

The air of Mr. Middleton was very grand and important indeed. He felt that he was a man of consequence—that his bosom was the temple of justice, and that J. P. was written on his forehead, or ought to be. With a self-satisfied smile, he

crossed the room to shake hands with Mrs. Charlton, and conversed with her for a few minutes in a low voice, and then observing that Miss Charlton and her lover were speaking together, he exclaimed, "No conversing with the prisoner. Constable, see that nothing of this kind takes place."

"Then I am to consider myself a prisoner, sir?" demanded Morton addressing the magistrate.

"Most assuredly!" answered Mr. Middleton, with a look of cold scorn.

"On what charge, and on whose authority?" asked the young gentleman.

"On the charge of fraud, robbery, and murder!" replied Mr. Middleton, "and on my authority."

His tone was intended to be very laconic and decided, but Morton persevered. "May I beg to know who it is brings the charge?" he next inquired. "Of course you do not act without information."

"Oh, no!" answered the magistrate; "I act upon very good information. You are in custody on suspicion, my good young man. You will hear more by-and-by."

"I wish I could venture to call you a good old one," answered Morton; "but, at all events, let me bring to your remembrance that a person should always be looked upon as innocent till he is proved guilty, and that it is sometimes incon-

venient to forget that you are a gentleman or that another is so, as you may have occasion afterwards to repent it."

"What, sir! do you venture to threaten me, sir?" exclaimed Mr. Middleton in fury; "to threaten a magistrate in the execution of his duty!"

"Oh dear, no!" replied Morton, calmly; "I do not threaten you at all, Mr. Middleton. I only wish to call you back to a sense of propriety. I beg leave to say, sir, that I am not your good young man; for I am either your very bad young man indeed, or not your young man at all."

"This is foolish nonsense," replied the worthy gentleman; "but we shall soon have Sir Simon Upplestone here, and we can proceed to business on the spot. If you will have the kindness to let us use one of your drawing-rooms, Mrs. Charlton, I do not see why we should adjourn. Or we can go to the library, which, perhaps, will be more out of your way."

"Oh dear, no!" answered Mrs. Charlton; "let it be here, by all means. There stands a young lady who declares she will be present the whole time; and I rather imagine that I shall be forced to submit to examination as a witness."

Mr. Middleton raised his eyebrows at the announcement of Louisa's intention, and looked surprised at Mrs. Charlton's hint of her own testimony being important; but after a few mo-

ments' private conversation with that lady, he seemed still more surprised, and turning round, exclaimed aloud, "Is it possible! The whole seems so clear that we might, I think, commit him for trial at once—but here is Sir Simon, I suppose. Who has he got with him, I wonder?"

The last observations of Mr. Middleton were produced by the sound of steps and voices coming up the stairs; but, when the door opened, he beheld not only his friend Sir Simon Upplestone, but Dr. Western and another gentleman, with two or three persons of an inferior class, standing at the top of the staircase. The first who entered was the baronet, who, without noticing any one else in the room, advanced straight towards his brother magistrate, and then said in a loud whisper, "I am afraid there has been a great mistake here, Middleton. You've been in too great a hurry."

"Not a bit, Sir Simon," replied Mr. Middleton, in a determined tone. "You are not acquainted with all the circumstances, my good friend."

"Nor you either, Middleton," answered the other.

While he was speaking Dr. Western entered the room, with an expression both of pain and indignation on his countenance, and advancing at once to Morton, by whose side Louisa was still standing, he shook hands with them both, and then turning to the other magistrates,

demanded aloud, "What is all this folly, Mr. Middleton?"

"Hush, hush," said Morton in a low tone. "Let the whole thing proceed, my dear friend. I wish particularly to see that worthy lady play her game out."

In the mean time Mr. Middleton was answering Dr. Western's question in a somewhat sarcastic tone, saying, "The folly, my reverend friend, happens to be no folly at all. An exceedingly strong case of suspicion has been made out against that gentleman, standing there, as accessory, if not principal, in the robbery of Mallington Hall; and the murder of poor Edmonds; and since I have come here this morning additional evidence has been tendered, which must, I think, place his guilt beyond all manner of doubt, and require his immediate committal. I am glad of the assistance of my two brother justices, but if they had not been present I should have taken the responsibility upon myself."

A clear merry laugh rang through the room, and a good round voice exclaimed, "Ay, if *ifs* and *ands* were pots and pans, there would be no work for the tinkers.—How do you do, my dear sir? how do you do? You seem to have had a pleasant time of it since we parted yesterday evening; but when the cat's away the mice will play. As it seems clear we are to have larks for supper, I may as well get ready my knife and



fork;" and Mr. Quatterly, after having shaken hands with Morton, and given a gay sparkling glance from his face to that of Louisa Charlton, murmuring to himself, "Devilish pretty! devilish pretty!" pulled out of his pocket a note-book, a pencil and some papers, folded up and tied together with red tape.

At the same time Dr. Western was advancing to speak with the other magistrates and Mrs. Charlton, who were gathered together in a group on the opposite side of the room; but Morton at this moment took a step forward, and said aloud, "My dear Dr. Western, you must hear me for a moment. This business cannot, and must not be stopped. A very horrible charge, perfectly unfounded, as you well know, has been brought against me this morning, together with half a dozen other minor insinuations, partly proceeding from malice, and partly from stupidity, originating, I have no doubt, amongst the gossips of this little town, and fostered under the kind care of that lady and that gentleman," and he pointed to Mrs. Charlton and Mr. Middleton. "These charges and insinuations must at once be thoroughly and accurately investigated, and I have to beg you, my dear sir, and also my friend here on the left, not to bring forward any one particular to show the persons concerned the absurdity of the accusation, till all the charges themselves are fairly stated, and the evidence upon which they are grounded adduced. I



would rather, if it were necessary, sleep a night in prison than that the whole of the business should not be made quite clear."

Morton's coolness, and the determined tone in which he spoke—the whole conduct of Dr. Western towards him—the presence and the merriment of Mr. Quatterly, who, though his name had not yet been announced, was evidently no ordinary man—all struck and somewhat confounded both Mrs. Charlton and Mr. Middleton. The former somewhat regretting, perhaps, that she had gone so far, but with not a particle less venom in her heart, was only anxious to show a fair face to the world, and to prove that she was moved by none but the best of feelings, even whilst she pursued her own objects most virulently, and consequently, in the sweetest possible tone, she said, "The gentleman does me great injustice in supposing that I have fostered any slanders against him. I am sure Mr. Morton has no occasion to say that I have treated him with anything but unvarying kindness and hospitality ever since he first came into Mallington."

Mr. Middleton did not suffer Morton to reply; but, anxious to get a little farther insight into the business before he went on, he said aloud, though in a somewhat less pompous tone than before, "The case, as the young gentleman says, must have full investigation; but what he himself suggested, I think, would be the right course—namely, to remand him till to-morrow morning,

at eleven, when the whole evidence can be gone into, and the case fully examined."

"Against that I most decidedly protest," exclaimed Dr. Western. "Mr. Morton proposed no such thing. He merely said that he would rather submit to a night's imprisonment than that the matter should not be made clear; but I will not consent to any such course, when it can be made clear in five minutes."

"But, my dear sir, you are not the only magistrate present," said Mr. Middleton; "and if the majority vote for remanding the prisoner, I think it must be done—what do you say, Sir Simon?"

But Sir Simon was already tired of the business, and filled with many doubts as to whether they had not all got into a scrape. He, therefore, answered bluffly, "Why, you know, Middleton, the fox-hounds meet at Burnlêy to-morrow, and that 's twelve miles off, so I shall vote for going on to-day to a certainty."

"A cogent and irrefutable argument!" exclaimed Mr. Quatterly, rubbing his small fat white hands with great internal satisfaction at the various considerations of country justice. "Sir, I congratulate you upon such a high and equitable view of the case; but will you allow me to remind you all that the proceedings of the worshipful body here present have hitherto been somewhat irregular, more resembling those of a corporation committee, or of a meeting of the

various partners in a bankrupt bank, than of a body of gentlemen exercising high magisterial functions. Here are accused and witnesses, and magistrates and constables, and gentlemen and ladies—*quot tot et omnes*—all mixed up together in the same drawing-room. in a very indiscriminate manner. Now, if this room is to be converted into a justice-room, and it is not your pleasure to adjourn to a more fitting place,”—

“I think that would be much the best plan,” said Mr. Middleton.

But Mrs. Charlton, who liked to fight her battle upon her own ground, strongly objected; and both Dr. Western and Sir Simon Upplstone, each for their own several reasons, were also opposed to such a step.

“Well, then,” continued Mr. Quatterly, whose peculiarities gained for him considerable attention, though as yet no one but Morton and Dr. Western knew who he was—“since it is to be a justice-room, you had better draw that sofa-table across the other side. Each justice can have an arm-chair, and then there will be one left for the clerk who, by the way, had better be sent for. The witnesses had better be removed till they are needed, and if there be another drawing-room, as I take it, on that side, they can come in by those folding doors. Thus the whole proceeding can be conducted in the most delicate and lady-like manner possible, and,

whatever it may be in reality, it will have the appearance of justice at least."

Mr. Middleton was not so obtuse as to be blind to the fact that Mr. Quatterly was quietly laughing at them all; and he asked, in an angry tone, "And pray, sir, who are you, who come here, quite a stranger, to set us all to rights or wrongs, as the case may be?"

"A very humble individual, your worship," replied Mr. Quatterly, with a low bow and a quiet smile; "but, I believe, an honest man, though I have had everything in the way of temptation against me, being a magistrate, a lawyer, and, moreover—sad to say—the managing governor of several charities. I was educated for the bar; but finding briefs few, and money likely to be scanty in that branch of the profession, for the pure lucre of gain—like Tommy Tucker, who turned a Turk for two-pence—I became an attorney. Thus, sir, I have the honour of presenting myself to your worship as Timothy Quatterly, attorney-at-law, by some persons termed Esquire, and a J. P. for the county of Herts. At present, by your permission, I appear to watch these proceedings on the part of my client here."

Mr. Middleton and Mrs. Charlton were both somewhat distressed in mind. One step had been taken to knock their foundation from below them. Mr. Morton was not Mr. Wilkins—that

was evident. He was a man of some consequence, too, apparently, for he kept an attorney; and, as a consequence, he was more likely to be fool than knave. Mrs. Charlton asked for a glass of cold water, and spoke a few words to Mr. Middleton, to which Mr. Middleton replied in as low a tone as her own.

"I may be permitted to observe," said Mr. Quatterly, in a dry tone, "that it is not usual for magistrates to whisper with witnesses."

"Nor for witnesses to whisper with prisoners;" said Mr. Middleton, pointing towards Louisa and Morton, who still stood side by side, and were speaking together somewhat eagerly, notwithstanding the injunction to prevent such communication which the magistrate had laid upon the constable.

"Is this lady about to be a witness?" demanded Mr. Quatterly; "I was not aware of the fact."

"I am afraid it will be absolutely necessary, sir," replied Louisa, "though I could much wish to avoid it."

"For or against the prisoner, madam?" demanded the solicitor.

"Oh, for him to be sure!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton; "there can be no doubt of that!"

"Then all the witnesses had better retire, or all the witnesses had better be admitted," said Mr. Quatterly. "We can't make meal of one and malt of the other, you know, gentlemen."



“We have sent for our clerk, sir,” said Sir Simon Upplestone; “and we shall act by his opinion.”

“A capital thing to get a man who has an opinion,” said Mr. Quatterly, rubbing his hands again; “I didn’t know there were any in the county.”

The moment after, Mr. Skinner appeared, and looked round the room with some surprise and amazement. His affections seemed to be rather divided, and his mind bewildered by the variety of persons he saw. His eyes fell first, however, upon the group consisting of Louisa, Mr. Morton, and the constable, with Mr. Quatterly a step before them, as an outpost in advance of their camp; and he bowed low to the young lady, and still more low and reverently to the young gentleman. Mr. Quatterly, however, shook hands with him, saying, “Ah, Skinner! how do you do? These gentlemen are in a mess, I think;” and then, as he saw his fellow solicitor raise his eyes to the group on the opposite side of the room, he added, “There, Skinner, go across Tom Tickler’s ground, and tell their worships what they’re to do, for they don’t know.”

Mr. Skinner accordingly crossed over; and, after a brief consultation with the magistrates, decided that it was better all the witnesses should be admitted. It was their usual custom in that part of the county, he said, as it was merely a preparatory investigation, and truth might be



better obtained by giving general publicity in this stage of the proceedings. Mr. Quatterly did not object, though he shook his head, as if he had some doubts of the soundness of the doctrine; and the door having been opened, a mixed multitude entered, consisting of gamekeepers, gardeners, housekeepers, housemaids, Mr. Gibbs, and Miss Mathilda Martin. Mrs. Charlton, however, was somewhat surprised to see her friend Mrs. Windsor come in with the rest.

"What do you want here, Windsor?" said Mrs. Charlton, in a sharp key.

"To give my evidence, ma'am," said Mrs. Windsor, respectfully.

"Your evidence!" exclaimed the mistress. "You can know nothing about it."

"I think I do, ma'am," rejoined the housekeeper, drily.

In the mean time the chairs and tables were arranged, under the direction of Mr. Skinner, very much in the way that Mr. Quatterly had proposed. The magistrate's clerk, however, contented himself with an ordinary chair, and, greatly to Mrs. Charlton's surprise and disgust, placed the fourth arm-chair for Mr. Morton with his own hands close to the table, and opposite to the one which he himself was about to occupy, while the magistrates were arranged on either side. Pens, ink, and paper having been procured—Dr. Western, as the senior magistrate, placed in the chair—the witnesses arranged, some seated, some

standing towards the sides of the room,—the investigation commenced.

Dr. Western looked around the circle ; and then, with a glance at Mr. Quatterly, though his heart was very sad—for he was one of those true Christians who mourn over the crimes of their fellow-creatures—he could not forbear a faint smile at what he regarded as one of the most absurd scenes he had ever beheld. Mr. Quatterly caught his eye and laughed merrily, rubbing his small fat white hands as if it were the best joke in the world, for he was more accustomed to such scenes, and had so long given up the hope of mending human beings, that he thought he had a right to be amused at their follies, whether solemn or gay.

“ Let them go on ! Let them go on ! ” said the worthy solicitor, with a nod to the clergyman ; “ even in a farce, truths will come out unexpectedly.”

Mr. Middleton and Mrs. Charlton were both nettled at Dr. Western’s smile and Mr. Quatterly’s laugh—surprised, indeed, and somewhat apprehensive that they were not quite right, but more angry than either, and resolved to go on in their course only the more vehemently, in order to prove that they had had good cause for suspicion. Mrs. Charlton, it is true, was actuated by very different feelings from the worthy justice ; for, as she found that she could not gain her original purpose with Mr. Morton, she was resolved to

have revenge; and being, as we have shown, subject to much more severe internal commotions than her calm and sweet exterior usually suffered to appear, she would have given one of her own pretty white hands to have seen her lately-cherished guest hanging by the neck from any piece of timber that was convenient.

"I think I had better read," said Mr. Middleton, beginning the investigation, "the notes I took of the state of Mallington Hall, and the adjacent premises, when I examined them this morning, on receiving information of the crime that was committed there last night."

"By all means," answered Dr. Western; "I am as yet nearly ignorant of the whole circumstances."

"That is clear," said Mr. Middleton; and he then proceeded to read from a little note-book the memoranda which he had taken on the spot, commenting, as he went, with that sort of routine of common places, which is a wonderful engine for obtaining a reputation for sagacity—with the vulgar. Dr. Western listened with horror and grief, covering his eyes with his hands, as if unwilling that all he felt should appear; and the whole court, if it could be so called, heard the facts in deep silence.

When he had done this, Mr. Middleton paused, and looked round with the consciousness of having made a very neat and compact statement, deserving some credit.

Mr. Quatterly, however, stepped in to prevent

him enjoying his self-satisfaction too long. "Well, sir," he said, "and how does that affect the gentleman before you?"

"You shall hear in a few minutes, sir," answered Mr. Middleton, solemnly raising himself from his chair, and looking over the table at Morton's feet; "you must have remarked that the footsteps which were traced in the yard were of three distinct sizes. One very large and long, one somewhat smaller, and one very small and neat, precisely what is usually called a gentleman's footstep."

"Well, sir," said Mr. Quatterly, "what of that?" But Mr. Middleton did not choose to take any notice of the solicitor, and went on to say, addressing Dr. Western, "You will see here, my dear sir, the deposition of one Gibbs, taken by myself and Sir Simon Upplestone on the seventeenth of this month, by which it appears that on the very night when Mallington Hall was before attempted, the notorious Jack Williams was seen in the park in earnest conversation with this very Mr. Morton—in Mallington Park, I say, where neither of them had any right to be at that hour, except for illegal purposes."

Morton smiled, and Mr. Quatterly, as usual, rubbed his hands, saying, "A new dictum in law, I think—that men have a right to be in another man's park for illegal purposes. However, my dear sir, I deny the whole position, and beg that, before you assume that Mr. Morton had no

right to be there, you will prove it. Whether you do or not, I'll prove the contrary."

"How so, sir?" demanded Mr. Middleton, growing furious.

"By-and-by—by-and-by," said Mr. Quatterly, nodding his head; "let us have the whole case first. Pray read the deposition, Dr. Western, for, as the warrant I see is dated on that day, it may be of consequence."

Dr. Western put on his spectacles, and read, smiling when he came to the assertion that his young friend was known by another name than that of Morton, and saying, as a commentary, "I am well aware of that fact; and am afraid I must plead guilty to being an accessory."

When he had gone on to the end, Mr. Middleton proceeded, in the tone of a public accuser, rather than that of a justice of the peace. "It is proved by numerous witnesses," he continued, "that this gentleman, whoever he may be, was constantly seen hanging about Mallington Park and Mallington Hall—that he obtained admission more than once into the house, and examined it most curiously—that he made himself acquainted with the habits of the people upon the estate, and learned at what time they were least upon their guard. It was also proved, or can be proved, that he absented himself from Mallington without any apparent cause, or giving any notice of his departure, from the morning of Saturday till the morning of Monday, in which interval the robbery



and murder were committed. We have seen that he criminals who committed the act must have been well acquainted with the house, and must have gained information of the usual proceedings of the servants; that one set of footmarks was small and neat, very like those which would be left by the prisoner's feet; and that he has been seen consorting by night, and when he thought himself unobserved, with some of the most desperate characters in the county. Now, I must say, and must contend," and he thumped the table with his fist, "that there is perfectly sufficient before us to send the case to a jury, even if there were no other evidence to be produced, which I am informed there is, and evidence of a very important character too."

"I've seen an innocent man hanged upon less," said Mr. Quatterly, drily, and Louisa Charlton started and looked at him for a moment with fear and surprise.

The lady of the house had sat while all this was going on, with her arm thrown over the back of her chair, her two pretty little feet extended, and her head drooping forward with an air of studied but graceful attention. Slight, very slight indications of what was passing in her mind floated over her countenance from time to time; but now, when Mr. Middleton turned towards her, saying, "Mrs. Charlton, I think"—she rose and advanced towards the table with a melancholy and reluctant air.

"I have very little evidence to give, sir," she



said, " myself; and as you all know what kindness and attention I have shown to Mr. Morton, and what esteem, and I may say regard, I once entertained for him, you will easily conceive how painful that evidence must be, especially as it is confirmatory of the worst suspicions that are entertained. Mr. Morton has been, as Mr. Middleton says, absent from my house, where he was on a visit, from Saturday morning till this morning, at about a quarter to ten—at least, that was the first time I saw him, though I am afraid there is clear proof of his having been in the house previously, without my knowledge. Just before I met him coming up the stairs, and apparently freshly arrived, I was called out of the drawing-room by the upper housemaid, who informed me that she had found in Mr. Morton's room, wrapped up in a bundle, and thrust under the drawers, a sort of carman's frock, stained with blood, and a jacket in the same condition, with a good deal of mud and dirt upon it, but having the whole sleeve still wet with gore. Not having heard, at the time, of the barbarous murder of poor Edmonds, and never dreaming that there was any one in my house who would commit such an act, I took no particular notice, but said that it must be some accident, and ordered her to leave the things where she found them. She is here present, and can give her own testimony. These blood-stained clothes are, I suppose, where they were first discovered."

"Yes, ma'am," said the housemaid, dropping a courtesy.

"The bloody-minded villain!" murmured Miss Mathilda Martin, giving a look of horror at Morton, whose face certainly testified some astonishment.

"A pretty little concatenation," said Mr. Quatterly. "Pray, sir, let us have the things down. You can take the evidence of the housemaid while they are being brought."

Mrs. Charlton immediately ordered one of the men-servants to go up and fetch the bundle, describing where it was to be found, and laying particular stress upon the words, "In Mr. Morton's room."

The housemaid was then called upon for her testimony, and fully confirmed Mrs. Charlton's account; adding, that she had found the marks of some dirty footsteps up the stairs that morning. She was just concluding when the servant returned with the bundle, which was speedily spread out upon the table.

"Look to Miss Charlton," cried Dr. Western, "she is going to faint!"

"No," said Louisa, rising; "but I wish to give my evidence, terrible as it is."

"Stop a little, my dear," said Mr. Quatterly, patting her gently on the hand. "Do not alarm yourself; this will all be made clear."

"Not without dreadful consequences," said Louisa, taking her seat again, and covering her eyes with her hand.

Each of the magistrates examined the frock and jacket carefully; and then Mr. Middleton, rising, said in a solemn and pompous tone, "Sir Simon, I think this is quite sufficient; and that we are not only justified, but called upon by our duty, to commit the prisoner for trial. Is it not so, Dr. Western?"

"Oh dear, no!" answered the clergyman. "We can do no such thing; for I happen to know, that it is utterly impossible that Mr. Morton can have had any share in this transaction."

Mrs. Charlton fixed her beautiful blue eyes upon him with not the sweetest expression in the world, and Mr. Quatterly, advancing a step, remarked, "You are in a mighty hurry, worshipful sir; I should have thought it was to-day that the fox hounds were to meet. One story is very good till another is told; and, by your good leave, you must now hear that other. You have made a very good story of it, and I must say that a capital special pleader was spoiled when nature turned you into a country squire; but now we will proceed in order, if you please; for you have made various assumptions, and thrown out various insinuations, of which I must clear the case."

"I beg, sir, that you would treat the court with respect," exclaimed Mr. Middleton, half rising.

"With the most profound," said Mr. Quatterly; "as deep as a draw-well, though not perhaps quite so clear. We will admit almost all your premises;

but strip them, if you please, of your deductions. In the first place, the prisoner, for reasons of his own, did choose, in coming down here, to assume a name different from that by which he usually goes, though still one that he has a right to, for his name is Edmond Morton, as I can testify. In the next place, he was seen—at least, I have no doubt that such was the case—in Mallington Park, speaking with that very notorious person Jack Williams, who is, I am happy to tell you, now in custody. I have no doubt either that their conversation was earnest, nay, perhaps, very vehement; but as to your assumption, that neither of them had any right there, that I have before denied, and do still deny.”

“Upon what grounds, sir?” demanded Mr. Middleton, beginning to find his ideas getting a little confused.

“Upon the best of all possible grounds,” answered Mr. Quatterly, “as you shall hear. Jack Williams, perhaps, had no right there—I am not aware that he had. It is not in evidence—and yet it might be so; for if Mr. Morton invited him he had a right, and therefore your assumption in his case is as unwarranted as in the other. But, in regard to Mr. Morton, I not only contend that he had a right; but that nobody on earth—let his condition, state, rank, or calling be what they may—had so good a right to be in Mallington Park, at any hour of the day or night which unto him might seem expedient; for who can have so

good a title to walk in a park, Mallington Park or any other, as the owner thereof?"

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Middleton. "Has Mr. Morton purchased the park? I did not know it could be sold."

"You have got a capital case of circumstantial evidence," continued Mr. Quatterly, enjoying the evident consternation and surprise of the profound magistrate, "and now I will tell you what you were going to commit a man for. For breaking into his own house, robbing his own plate-room, and shooting his own park-keeper. All these circumstances are very probable! Reason and likelihood goes with them. But stay a minute—don't be in a hurry, either on one side or the other. We will have the whole matter clear before we have done with it, if you please. You shall have full evidence that the gentleman now before you is the proprietor of Mallington Park, of Mallington Hall, and of everything that it contains, and that the poor man who lost his life there was his servant, and had been receiving wages from him for some time."

"I told you you were going too fast, Middleton," whispered Sir Simon Upplestone, across Dr. Western.

"Pish!" cried Mr. Middleton, in a high state of excitement, and Mr. Quatterly went on, saying, "As to Mr. Morton's absence from this place from Saturday morning till Monday morning that can be easily accounted for. But it may be



sufficient for our present purpose to show where that gentleman was at the time the murder was committed. Now, up to the hour of half-past seven o'clock on Sunday evening, he was, with myself and Dr. Western, at the distance of two and twenty miles from Mallington; he then set off in a hack post-chaise, and a dark night, intending, I believe, to sleep here; but the chaise unfortunately broke down some seven miles from this place, about ten o'clock. He reached a public-house, called the Hand-in-Hand, about four miles off, towards eleven, and remained there till this morning, at about half-past eight, when he left it to walk hither, without ever quitting the house in the interval. It may seem to the sagacity of your worships somewhat extraordinary that I should come here so well prepared to meet this case; and as justice is a very suspicious person, apt to peep out under her bandage, just to see that nobody is playing her a trick, this fact must be explained also. The truth, then, is, that as Dr. Western and myself were driving over hither from the town of——, we came upon Mr. Morton's post-chaise, with the axle broken, and one of the wheels off, and with a man doing his best to pull it further to pieces for the purpose of mending it. The post-boy who drove it was in the act of giving instructions to that effect, and by him we were informed that the late tenant of his vehicle had the night before gone on to the Hand-in-Hand, two or three miles further, and,



stopping there to water the horses, we had a full, true, and particular account from the landlady of the arrival and departure of her guest, for whom we inquired. There sits Dr. Western, who can corroborate my evidence."

Dr. Western bowed his head and said, "Entirely."

"And now," continued Mr. Quatterly; but Mr. Middleton interrupted him, beginning to find that he was in what is usually termed the wrong box. "Oh!" he exclaimed, "if all these circumstances can be so clearly explained, the great weight of suspicion is removed; but still it would be satisfactory to all parties if the whole were cleared up, and perhaps Mr. Morton will assign the cause of his meeting with Williams, who is certainly not fit society for a gentleman of property."

"That is very easily explained, sir," replied Morton. "It may be in your recollection, and certainly is in Dr. Western's, that I was knocked down upon the common here, and on that occasion I lost a pocket-book containing the certificate of my grandfather's marriage, and various other papers of considerable importance. I sent for a Bow-street officer from London, and offered a reward for the recovery of the papers. We found that the parties who possessed them comprehended their value, and thought that I might be induced to give a much larger sum for them than I had offered. They opened a com-

munication with me to that effect, and a place of meeting was appointed, first in Wenlock Wood, and subsequently in Mallington Park. I went to the rendezvous, as agreed upon, alone, and not having been able to come to satisfactory terms with the man Williams, the person who met me there, I was walking back again when I saw somebody scampering off, who, it now seems, was the worthy gentleman with his Fragrant Balm of Trinidad. Such is the plain state of the case, as there are several persons here who know; and if there be anything else that requires explanation, it must be given, as the whole of this matter had better be cleared up at once, especially the placing of those bloody clothes in the room which I lately occupied, for I should wish to be quite sure that malice had no part in such a proceeding."

"Oh! hush, hush!" said a faint voice behind him.

But Mr. Middleton replied, without attending to those sounds, "That is just what I was going to observe, sir," he said; "it is very necessary that the fact should be explained. It seems clear to me that these clothes on which the blood is not yet dry, as you perceive, must have belonged to the person who committed the crime. Now, how came they in this house? How came they in that room? That is the question. Soames, you had better call all the servants up, and let my man and Sir Simon's aid you,

with any persons you can collect near, to ensure that nobody quits the house without permission."

Mrs. Charlton displayed at this moment a considerable degree of agitation. She moved about with a certain sort of nervous uneasiness in her chair, and seemed twice as if she was about to speak. She did not do so, however, and it was Mr. Quatterly who proceeded as soon as the magistrate had done. "There are one or two other questions; in the first place, I should like to establish," he said; "as the charge has been made against Mr. Morton, it is necessary to trace his whole course, and therefore I wish to question some of the servants, if you have no objection."

"None whatever," said Sir Simon Uppelstone.

"Not in the least," replied Mr. Middleton, courteously.

"I would fain know, then," continued Mr. Quatterly, "who it was that let this gentleman in this morning?"

"I did, sir;" answered the man Wilkinson, stepping forward.

"At what hour was that?" demanded Mr. Quatterly.

"It might be half-past nine, or a quarter to ten," was the servant's reply.

"What did Mr. Morton then do?" inquire Mr. Quatterly.

"He walked straight up stairs towards the

drawing-room," answered Wilkinson, "and met my mistress at the drawing-room door."

"You are quite sure that he did not go up to his room?" said Mr. Quatterly.

"Quite sure," replied the servant, "for I heard him speak to my mistress immediately, and saw them go into the drawing-room together."

"I will only remark," proceeded the solicitor, "that, from the lady's evidence, these articles were found before she met Mr. Morton. I will now ask, however, whether any one saw that gentleman in the house, or about the house, before he was admitted by the footman?"

There was a complete silence; and he went on, "Then, now, Mr. What's-your-name, which door did Mr. Morton come in by? There are more doors than one to the house, I suppose."

"He came in by the great gates, sir," answered the man. "The bell rang, and I opened the door of the house, and went out to let him in."

"Then he was actually without the garden-wall when you first saw him," said Mr. Quatterly.

Wilkinson assented, and the lawyer went on, "Was the house-door locked, or open?"

"It was locked when I got up, sir," said the housemaid; "but I opened it to sweep out the hall."

"Well, then, my pretty girl," continued the solicitor, "since you are upon your legs, I'll ask you a question or two, with their worships' leave. You said just now that you had found dirty foot-

marks up the stairs. When did you make that discovery?"

"When first I got up, sir," said the girl; "as soon as I had taken down the shutters off the glass-door into the garden I saw them directly—first upon the mat, and then upon the stairs, and upon the oil-cloth, too, for that matter."

"Then they began at the glass-door going into the garden," said Mr. Quatterly, "and went up stairs. How far could you trace them?"

"Why, as far as Mr. Alfred's room," replied the girl.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Quatterly, and Dr. Western suddenly raised his head with a look of horror and consternation.

"Were the marks plain there?" demanded the solicitor, still addressing the housemaid.

"There was a piece of mud and some gravel stones," replied the girl; "but they were not so plain as below."

"Could you track them any further?" was the solicitor's next question.

"I didn't remark them," she said.

"Did you go into that room?" demanded Mr. Quatterly.

"No, sir," replied the girl; "I had all the lower part of the house to do first; and when I went up after our breakfast I first went to Mr. Morton's room, to open the windows there. It lies at the other end of the passage, you know."



"No, I don't know," answered Mr. Quatterly. "What may be the distance?"

"Oh! not ten steps," answered the girl. "Mr. Alfred's is just over Miss Louisa's room, and the other is down two doors beyond."

"Was the glass door open or shut?" inquired Mr. Quatterly.

"It was locked, but not bolted," said the housemaid.

"I bolted it last night with my own hands," observed the butler, who had entered the room, with the cook and several other servants, a minute or two before; but Mr. Quatterly went on, still addressing the housemaid, "Were you up first in the house?" he demanded.

"No, sir," replied the girl, beginning to get a little bewildered. "I think Mrs. Windsor and the still-room maid were down before me."

"We were," said Mrs. Windsor; "and I found the door unlocked, and locked it till the men got up. I have got more to say when it is wanted; but I think my young lady can tell more than any of us."

Mr. Quatterly looked from the housekeeper to Louisa; but Miss Charlton's eyes were fixed upon her step-mother, who sat opposite, fixed and immoveable as a statue, with her face pale and her head bent down. There was a pause for a moment, and then Louisa rose, and with somewhat trembling steps advancing to the table, spoke across the table to Dr. Western in a low tone,



"You had better take her away," she said; "you had better take her away."

The worthy rector instantly rose, and going round to Mrs. Charlton, he said, "I think it would be best for you to retire, my dear lady. You are not well. This is too much for you."

But Mrs. Charlton instantly raised her head quickly, and sharply exclaiming, "No! it's all false; but I'll hear it all; I'll hear it all!"

"Be advised," said Dr. Western, in a tender tone.

"No, I will not!" she cried; "I understand it all—Go on, go on!" and Dr. Western retiring from her side, resumed his seat. Louisa had by this time retired to the chair where she had been sitting, and stood trembling beside it with a face very pale, and her lips almost bloodless.

"You said you had evidence to give, my dear," said Mr. Quatterly; "Will you give it now, or shall I examine this good lady first?"

Louisa hesitated, but Mrs. Charlton exclaimed vehemently, "I demand that one should be sent out of the room, while the other speaks. They will frame their stories one upon the other, I dare say, if they have not done it already."

Louisa said nothing, but moved towards the door. Mrs. Windsor, however, replied, "I haven't spoken to Miss Charlton to-day, ma'am—not a word—and have only to tell the truth, though I am afraid what I am going to say may offend her."

"Tell the truth, Mrs. Windsor," said Louisa, turning at the door, "whatever it may be—your so doing will give me no offence, be assured."

"A pretty scene!" cried Mrs. Charlton, with a look of contempt.

"Now, ma'am, what have you to depose?" said Sir Simon Upplestone, who was getting heartily tired of the affair, and wished it over.

"Why, merely this, sir," said Mrs. Windsor. "Last night as I was lying awake in bed I heard somebody walking in the garden. My room is at the far corner just over Mr. Morton's. I can't tell what o'clock it was, for I had gone to sleep for a short time when I first laid down; but it could not be very late, for the moon was still far up. However, thinking it might be somebody that wanted to rob the house, I got up and went to the window, and there I saw a man below on the gravel walk, who seemed to throw some stones up towards Miss Charlton's room. He then called out, but not very loud, 'Louisa, Louisa!' which is her name. He then seemed to make signs to open the window, and presently I could plainly hear it thrown up. After that, he asked her to come down and open the door, for he wished to come in. After that, I could hear Miss Charlton say she would call one of the servants; but he answered not to do so on any account; but to come down herself, and he spoke sharply and angrily to her; after which she told him to wait a minute and she would. He seemed very careful

to tell her not to wake any one, saying that he did not wish it to be known that he was there. After waiting a minute or two, I could plainly hear the door below unchained and unlocked; and the minute after a foot coming quickly up the stairs, stopped at Mr. Latimer's door, and went in. It did not come as far as Mr. Morton's room then, but after about two minutes I heard it come along the passage, and some one opened the door of Mr. Morton's room, which is just below mine—the bed-room, not the dressing-room, I mean."

"Ay, it was in the bed-room, under the drawers, I found the things," said the housemaid.

"Whoever it was did not stay there a minute," continued Mrs. Windsor, "and then went back and down stairs. He seemed to stop a minute at Miss Louisa's door, and then went down and out into the garden. As soon as I heard the door shut I went back to the window again, and I saw the same man go along the gravel walk, and take the first turning to the left towards the wall. I could see him quite plain, for the night was clear."

She paused, and Mr. Quatterly inquired, "Did you ever see him before?"

"Yes, often," replied Mrs. Windsor, in a firm but solemn tone.

"Do you see him now?" demanded Mr. Quatterly.

"No," replied Mrs. Windsor, fixing her eyes full upon Morton.

"Was he the man before you?" asked Mr. Quatterly again.

"Certainly not," answered the housekeeper.

"Then that is all I have to do with the affair," rejoined the solicitor, taking a step back.

"Then who do you really think it was?" demanded Mr. Middleton.

"I think and fully believe," replied Mrs. Windsor, "that it was Mr. Alfred Latimer. His person, perhaps, I could not swear to, for when first he came he seemed strangely disguised; and though, when he went away, he was differently dressed, his back was towards me; but his voice I could swear to any where, and he called Miss Charlton, sister, too, which he sometimes did when"—

"Liar and hussy!" cried Mrs. Charlton, starting up and stamping her foot; but Mr. Middleton, whose views were now altogether changed, exclaimed, "We must not have anything of this kind, madam. The case must be investigated fully. Shall we call in Miss Charlton?"

"I think you had better first inquire how the person was dressed," said Mr. Quatterly, "and also call in the gardener, for footsteps must have been remarked."

All the magistrates assented to this course; and in regard to the apparel of the person she had seen, Mrs. Windsor replied, "That, when first she saw him, he was dressed in a carman's frock, such as that which lay on the table; but that,

when he went away, he had on a dark coat such as Mr. Latimer usually wore."

A pause ensued, not pleasant even to the somewhat obtuse Mr. Middleton, for he was one of those men of action who are uncommonly puzzled when they have nothing to talk about.

At length the gardener was brought in and questioned, and seeing the frowning countenance of his mistress, and the grave expression upon every face around, he instantly became possessed by that truly English demon, the fear of committing himself, and sturdily resolved to know nothing. Mr. Middleton, however, piqued himself on that art—the meanest of all forensic tricks—the art of cross-examination; and as Mr. Quatterly rested satisfied with having cleared his client, the worthy magistrate took the task upon himself.

"Pray, gardener," he said, "what did you remark particular in the garden this morning when you first came in?"

"Nothing particular, sir," replied the gardener, steadily.

"Oh! of course," said Mr. Middleton, with a laugh; "from what I have seen of the garden, I know that you never look to anything but the cabbage-beds; but you can at least say whether you saw anything particular in them."

"I look to every part of the garden," replied the man, nettled—"cabbage-beds too; though



the under-gardener has more to do with them; but I see that they are all right, morning and evening."

"We had better send for the under-gardener," said Mr. Middleton, aloud. "We shall gain no information from this fellow; he is clearly incompetent. You take no notice of the bowling-green or the gravel-walks, I suppose, my good man? It's the under-gardener who mows and rolls them, I suppose."

"Much you know about it!" answered the gardener. "There's no bowling-green here; and as to the gravel walks, though he rolls them, I sees when they want rolling. Why, it is only within the last blessed half-hour that I ordered him to roll the gravel under the windows, and up the great straight walk, and the little serpentine, to take out the foot-marks."

"Your own foot-marks?" said Mr. Middleton, in an indifferent tone. "No one has been out in the garden but yourself and the man, I understand."

"Some one has, since last night," said the gardener, "that I can swear, for there were prints all the way along that were neither mine nor his'n;" and having been led thus far, the poor fellow was soon driven to give an accurate description of the traces of Alfred Latimer's feet from the wall to the house and back again. He was then dismissed, with a warning neither to go near the footsteps himself nor to suffer the under-



gardener to roll them out if it were not done already ; and then Louisa Charlton was summoned to give her evidence, Mr. Middleton merely observing upon the gardener's testimony ; " Exactly the same as those of the smaller prints at Mallington Hall."

Louisa entered more calm than she had departed. She was still very pale, and her steps still wavered. Her heart, too, sank, and she felt afraid that her voice would fail her when she came to speak ; but she had had time for thought, she had had time to ask herself what was her duty, and the voice within at once answered, " To tell the plain truth." It was a terrible thing indeed to bear any part in destroying one whose young years had been spent under the same roof with herself, who had been accustomed to call her sister, whom she had often aided and befriended, for whose wilfulness and vices she had often mourned,—but still she felt that she must not let such feelings take from her her truth ; and though she resolved not to offer aught in evidence against him that was not drawn from her by questions, she was determined to answer each question truly, without a shadow of turning.

If, however, she expected to escape close questioning she was mistaken ; for as soon as she entered, Dr. Western having first requested her to take a seat, Mr. Middleton proceeded to interrogate her in a way that left no opportunity of passing aught over in silence, taking as a text—

book Mrs. Windsor's account; and having gained the admission that some one had come under the window a little after twelve, had thrown up some pebbles against it, and called her by name, he in plain terms directed her to state all that had occurred between that period and her retiring to rest. Louisa told all truly, but as succinctly as possible; often stopped and questioned as she went, and still giving true and straightforward answers, till at length, just as she was replying that Alfred Latimer was dressed when he came in a carman's frock—the very one, she believed, upon the table—Mrs. Charlton, seeing that the proofs against her unhappy son were all too clear, and that, in her own malignity and covetousness, she had been the person to bring them all to light, exclaimed almost with a shriek, “Oh, treacherous girl!” and in a vain effort to reach the door fell fainting almost at Mr. Morton's feet.

## CHAPTER XI.

THE fainting of Mrs. Charlton caused, as may be supposed, a good deal of confusion in the little court of inquiry held in her back drawing-room ; and there were few who did not feel some degree of pity for her situation. Miss Mathilda Martin, indeed, muttered something about pride having a fall, and declared that she had always known how it would be ; but sympathy was the prevailing feeling amongst the rest of those assembled, and Morton himself raised her, and bore her to the sofa in the next room. Louisa stood by her ; and, aided by the servants, used all the ordinary means to recall her to consciousness ; but when she began to revive, and good Mr. Nethersole, the surgeon, who had been sent for, appeared, Dr. Western took Louisa by the hand, saying, " Come away, my love. You will still be wanted to give further evidence, and your presence here will only irritate her."

Louisa was well aware that what he said was true, but yet she would fain have remained to

proffer her services at least. Mr. Middleton, however, interfered, saying, "Leave her with Mr. Nethersole, Miss Charlton, and let us return to business.—We may want you, Nethersole, after you have done here; so just step in when the lady has recovered."

When once set forms of any kind are disarranged, it is a very difficult thing to get them into order again. Now the fainting of Mrs. Charlton threw magistrates, solicitors, constables, and witnesses, all out of their orbits; and for at least a quarter of an hour after they had returned to the room where the investigation had been going on, a confused, desultory, gabbling conversation took place, of which it is impossible to give any adequate description. Mr. Middleton talked in a loud voice with Mr. Skinner and Mr. Quatterly; the latter of whom treated him with various nursery rhymes and sundry puns, till Mr. Middleton was left in a state of doubt as to whether he was mad or laughing at him; Dr. Western spoke in a low voice with Morton and Louisa; Mr. Soames, in very choice English, of its own particular kind, harangued the butler and footman; and Miss Mathilda Martin expatiated to the female servants upon her own wisdom, wit, and discrimination; informing them, that she had foreseen the whole affair, and told Mr. Middleton all about it, before it began—an assertion the truth of which the reader has had the means of discovering.

The only person who kept silence in the room

was Mrs. Windsor; and she, as usual, looked quietly about her, and made up her mind as to what was to be done, listening to everybody with decent attention, and catching words and sentences here and there which were not intended for her ear.

The first thing that had a tendency to give order to this chaos was the entrance of Mr. Nethersole; but even he, important personage as he was, had to move through the crowd unattended to, till he called attention by saying, "Ahem, Mr. Middleton!—Ahem, Sir Simon!—Did you wish for my presence, gentlemen?"

"Oh, yes, yes, certainly," said Mr. Middleton; "but really, I think, we had better take our places again."

"How did you leave Mrs. Charlton?" demanded Dr. Western, as the magistrates moved towards their seats.

"Pretty well, pretty well," replied the surgeon, with a mysterious air. "She seems in great grief, though; a slight disposition to hysteria coming on: so I have administered a few drops of the fetid spirit of ammonia, and shall follow it up by-and-by with some sulphuric ether. I have recommended the recumbent position, as she seems in great grief."

"Is that a good remedy for grief, doctor?" asked Mr. Quatterly. "I know, that by the vulgar—the *fruges consumere nati*—lying is considered a remedy for many evils; but I did not know it was for grief."

Mr. Nethersole stared.

"Now let us to business," said Mr. Middleton. "There are one or two questions, Miss Charlton, which I wish to ask you before we proceed with Mr. Nethersole's evidence. Be so kind as to take that seat again, and we shall soon have done. In the first place, are you quite sure and certain, beyond all doubt and dubitation whatever, that the person to whom you gave admittance last night was absolutely and distinctly Mr. Alfred Latimer?"

"I am but too certain, sir," replied Louisa, in a low and sad but clear tone.

"It was quite dark at the time," said Mr. Middleton, anxious to show his acumen; "the person you saw was disguised; that is to say, clothed in unusual apparel, if it was Mr. Latimer; the moon at that time must have been, I think, at the southern angle of the house, so as not to shine in at the door. Now, could you see his face so distinctly as to be able to swear that it was he?"

"I took one of the candles from my dressing-table," answered Louisa, "and he took it out of my hand at the door, so that I could not help seeing his face. Indeed, sir, I should be but too willing to doubt, were it possible."

"Don't be frightened, my dear young lady, don't be frightened!" said Mr. Middleton; "we only wish to make the whole matter quite clear, that is all. He took the candle from you, you



say. Did he bring it back again to you when he went away?"

"He might bring it to my door, perhaps," replied Louisa, "but I would not let him in; for I was frightened at his appearance and manner, and thought, at the time, he had gone mad."

"Did he speak to you at the door of your room, my dear?" asked Dr. Western.

"He spoke through the door," said Louisa, "and bade me tell no one that he had been here."

"Now let the housemaid and the constable go up to Mr. Alfred Latimer's room, and examine two things," said Mr. Middleton, "first, whether there is there a candlestick belonging to Miss Charlton's dressing-table.—I suppose you will know it, young woman?"

"Oh dear! yes, sir," said the housemaid, "it is quite different from the others in the house."

"And next let them see if they can trace the steps there," continued Mr. Middleton. "Have you swept it out yet, young woman?"

"No, your worship," replied the housemaid, "I have not been in yet at all, because—"

"Never mind because," said Mr. Middleton; "we don't want any becauses. Go away with the constable. Bring down an accurate report, Soames, of all that you see and find.—Now, Mr. Nethersole, we will take your evidence, if you please."

Mr. Nethersole advanced, and Mr. Middleton proceeded to inquire whether he had visited the

Hall and examined the body of poor Edmonds, the park-keeper. Having replied that he had, he was directed to state what remarks he had made, and what he supposed to be the cause of his death, though Mr. Quatterly justly observed that this was evidence rather for the coroner's inquest than the magistrates.

"I found a wound," he said, "in both sides of the head, which, from the appearance it presented, must have been caused by a pistol-ball fired from the right side, where it cut the temporal artery and passed through the anterior lobe of the brain, finding exit on the right side, about two inches above the eyebrow."

Sir Simon Upplestone had said nothing for some time, and he owned to himself that Mr. Middleton was the dominant spirit; but still he thought he ought to have his share of importance, and might as well ask a solemn question too, to throw light or darkness on the matter, as the case might be. "Pray, Mr. Nethersole," he said, "did you use any means of resuscitation?"

There are some questions so utterly confounding that the wit of the most ingenious man upon earth cannot find a ready answer to them, and Mr. Nethersole, with the most profound respect for the worthy baronet, and every desire to answer as fast as possible, could only stare in silence for a full minute, at being asked whether he had attempted to restore a man to life who

had been shot through and through the head nearly twelve hours before.

"We have an authentic record," said Mr. Quatterly, in a low voice, "of a man having burnt his mouth by eating cold plumb porridge, and of another having bitten his own nose off, so that it is clear nothing is impossible; and therefore, whatever others may think, I hold the question to be a very sensible one."

"My dear sir, I can't jest upon the subject," said Morton, to whom the words were addressed. But, as Sir Simon Upplestone evidently waited for an answer, Mr. Nethersole at last made shift to say, "Why, no, Sir Simon, I did not think it would be of any avail, for I never knew a man recover with his brains blown out; and, besides, the poor fellow had been dead many hours, the limbs were quite rigid, so it could have answered no purpose."

"I think I would have tried something," said Sir Simon, sagely.

Mr. Middleton contrived to occupy about five minutes more with questions of somewhat greater sagacity, but not much more pertinence; and at the end of that time the constable and the housemaid re-appeared.

"Well, Soames, well!" cried Mr. Middleton, "what have you discovered?"

"Why, I found this here candlestick, your worship," answered the constable, putting one down on the table. "It's burnt out in the

socket, you see, sir, and scattered all the wax about. It was a-top of the drawers in Mr. Latimer's room. It might have set the house a-fire. Then, as to the footsteps, we traced two or three of them in straight from the door up to the drawers, and one of the drawers had been pulled open, for we saw the mark of a hand upon it, somewhat dirty, and not quite dry, and the same is on the candlestick, if you'll look, and then on the floor, tumbled down, with the top off, was a hat-box, which the girl says had a new hat in it yesterday; but the hat is gone now, howsoever; and there were two finger marks on the top."

"Did you find any steps towards Mr. Morton's room?" asked Mr. Middleton.

"Why, no, sir," said the constable; "but the girl says she swept the passage and the room. We found nothing particular there, though I went over it, just to see underneath the drawers, where the bundle had been stowed away; the carpet was somewhat bloody—not much, just a scratch of blood, like; but that shows that the job couldn't have been long done, or the things would have been dry."

"Very true, very true," said Mr. Middleton; and, turning to Morton, he said, "I think, sir, the evidence given clears you of all suspicion."

"Then you'll have the goodness to dismiss the warrant," said Mr. Quatterly.

“ I think we ought to have evidence,” said Sir Simon Upplestone, “ that the gentleman is really the proprietor of Mallington Hall, for on that rests a great deal of the matter.”

“ Not a whit,” replied Mr. Quatterly. “ If he had no other property than a mortgage on the moon there is not one suspicious circumstance against him. But the evidence you shall have. There is your own clerk, a very respectable solicitor, whom you all know. He can testify to the fact.”

“ I beg leave to depose,” said Mr. Skinner, rising and speaking with due deliberation, “ that this gentleman, commonly called and known by, in these parts, the name of Mr. Morton, is the undoubted proprietor of Mallington Hall, and the Mallington Park estate, together with all the goods, chattels, household furniture, books, pictures, plate, and appurtenances therein contained, or belonging thereto;” and down he sat, having said exactly what he thought sufficient, and not one word more.

Sir Simon Upplestone was frustrated; for, if truth must be told, a certain very ticklish propensity, easily excited in human beings, and called curiosity, was the true motive of the question he had put. He wanted to know, in short, who Mr. Morton was, and what, and all about him; and Mr. Quatterly saw through and through him as if he had been a piece of rock crystal.



“And now, Dr. Western,” said Mr. Quatterly, “I think, my very reverend friend, that it will be expedient for you to inform your worshipful brethren of the facts which came to our knowledge this morning regarding two worthy gentlemen named Thomas Brown and John Williams, and also in regard to another personage called Mr. Alfred Latimer, against whom a slight case of suspicion has been made out this morning. Your worships will remark that I say slight; because it is very slight indeed, and though, from the temper of the court, it is evident that the young gentleman does not appear in a very favourable light, yet it must be recollected that nothing has been proved against him whatsoever as yet; but that he entered his own mother’s house clandestinely and in disguise on the same night that this unhappy event occurred. The disguise, however, might have been assumed from a thousand different causes; the clandestine mode of his coming might be accounted for in various ways; and the blood which was found upon the clothes supposed to be cast off by him may be that of a hare, of a rabbit, or a barn-door fowl, for aught we know to the contrary.”

“There, my dear,” he continued, turning to Louisa, “go and tell that to your step-mother, it may be some comfort to her; and as for yourself, your white face and trembling hand shows that you have had quite enough of this business already.”



Louisa felt that it was indeed, as he said, and rose to depart, and Morton very naturally accompanied her for a short time from the room—not, indeed, that he had the slightest intention of visiting Mrs. Charlton, as he was well aware that in the existing state of that lady's mind his presence was not likely to be peculiarly agreeable to her.

## CHAPTER XII.

WHEN last we left Dr. Western and worthy Mr. Quatterly, previous to bringing them suddenly and unexpectedly to Mallington, where they have been acting and speaking throughout the last two chapters, they were standing before the small gate of the church of St. Stephen the Martyr, in the town of—*quod versu dicitur non est*. They were left there, too, to their own speculations; for, as may be remembered, the excellent constable, Mr. Higginthorp, had set off with almost superhuman velocity, to take hold of the collar of Jack Williams. Now Mr. Higginthorp was a very strong man indeed, considering his peculiar conformation, but that conformation gave him a tendency to topple over when any strong force was applied to the superior extremity of his person, which he was conscious of; and though it was difficult to make Mr. Higginthorp let go his hold when once he had taken it, as a bull-dog or a shark, yet a sudden wrench, such as might be caused by a knock-down blow, sometimes slipped a fustian

jacket out of his fingers ; and, therefore, when he saw his lean confederate coming slowly down the next street as he crossed it like a steam-engine, he made him a sharp sign to follow.

Neddy—for we know the sub-constable by no other name—was quick in taking a hint, and he followed not so rapidly, indeed, as Mr. Higginthorp ran, but with considerable speed, so that he had entered the main street of the town, and could see clear into the market-place when his superior had reached the latter. He there saw his superior slacken his pace, advance quietly behind two personages who were just turning into the door of the chief inn, and suddenly seize the shorter of the two by the collar of his coat. The person whom he thus grasped, without more ado, turned round and instantly struck the constable a blow between the eyes, which overset his bulk, and down Mr. Higginthorp went ; but so firm was his grasp of the stout cloth, that down went Jack Williams upon him, and fixed like a vice tightly screwed, the constable held on with his right hand, while with his left, rolling over and tumbling in the kennel, he contrived with quiet and pertinacious resolution to extract from the wide open pocket of his coat a pair of iron handcuffs, which, with marvellous dexterity he essayed to slip over the wrists of his destined prey, even in the midst of the fierce struggle that was going on between them. At the same time he shouted loud and strong, “ Help, in the king’s name ! I calls upon

all good men to aid and abet me in getting seizure of this here felon!"

The landlord of the inn had retired into his domicile some five minutes before; and one of the waiters and a helper in the stable, who saw the commencement of the affray, having no vocation for aiding constables, retreated immediately. But a stout shopkeeper of the town, and a hump-backed man who was walking with him, ran up and stopped Brown, just as he was beating a retreat; and Neddy coming up, well disciplined by Mr. Higginthorp, cast himself on the back of Jack Williams, and directing his efforts to the one sole object of getting the handcuffs on his wrists, soon saw him powerless in his upper limbs.

"What the devil do you mean by attacking me in this way?" cried Jack Williams, whose policy now was to assume a different tone from that of resistance, "if you are a constable, why did you not tell me so?"

"Oh, we always secures our man first, and then we tells him," answered Mr. Higginthorp. "There's more lost nor gained at any time by talking, Mr. Williams. I say, Jack, that was a wiper you gave me between the eyes. Winegar-like, it makes 'em tingle. But that's all over; so now be quiet and easy, and come along, like two respectable gentlemen. Their wurships want a bit of talk with you about that there job last night at Mallington Hall."

But Jack Williams was not so easily frightened

as young Blackmore; and he turned round his head to Brown, closing his teeth fast, and slightly raising his under lip, which the other received as a warning to be silent.

"Well, sir," said Williams, with an air of as much dignity as could have been assumed by a captive prince, "I do not know what you are talking of; but if you are really a constable, you must take me in tow, and bring me to what port you like."

"'Any port's good in a storm,' they says, Jack," answered Mr. Higginthorp; "and so, as this here is blusterous weather for you, why I'll just steer you to the nearest harbour, which is Mr. Muzzlewell's justice-room. You'll find friends there, I'm thinking; and that's always mighty pleasant for the misfortunate."

"Certainly," replied Jack Williams, drily; "only I'm not so *misfortunate* as you think, Master Constable. And you may be more so, for the assault you have committed on me; so look to yourself."

"I always does," answered Mr. Higginthorp, "and a little to other folks too. But what signifies talking? Come along.—I'll trouble you, Mr. Gillaghan jeest to look after that 'ere fellow, along with Neddy; we won't trouble you far."

Thus saying, he walked on by the side of Williams, who accompanied him calmly, revolving in his own mind every means of escape that could suggest itself to a fertile imagination, long prac-

tised in extracting hope and even success from the most adverse circumstances. Had he been alone he would have entertained no apprehension. Fear, indeed, he entertained none; for, both by habit of danger and by corporeal temperament, he was incapable of terror. But in the present instance he well knew, that the folly or the indiscretion of any of those who were more or less his accomplices might produce a result fatal to himself and them; and his chief trust was, that Alfred Latimer might be beyond pursuit; that Maltby might not be suspected; and that the habitual taciturnity of Brown might be only increased by the peril in which he stood. How suspicion had fallen upon himself, and how the crime he had committed had been so soon discovered, puzzled him a little; but he resolved to wait and watch, and to assume the air of perfect innocence and unconsciousness against any proofs. In some respects he had provided against contingencies. He had come into the town from the side opposite to Mallington; he had taken care that the ill-gotten wealth which he and Brown possessed should be concealed where little probability existed of its being discovered; and he had laid out with Brown and Alfred Latimer a story, which they were all to tell in case of difficulty. Fortunately for his purpose that story had at least some fact in it; and all he doubted was that Brown might be able to stand examination in regard to the details.

Such were the thoughts that occupied him as he



walked on in the handcuffs towards the house of the worthy and worshipful Mr. Muzzlewell. Several persons were collected round the door waiting for admission, and some little bustle took place when the two prisoners were led on through the midst. Williams had hitherto been kept at a distance from Brown, but here they were for an instant brought close together; and the former immediately took advantage of it to whisper, "The story we agreed upon in every particular."

The next moment Williams was taken forward, and found himself suddenly in the presence of two of the magistrates of the town, while on the right of Mr. Muzzlewell appeared Dr. Western, and on the left of the other magistrate Mr. Quatterly. With Dr. Western Jack Williams was unfortunately too well acquainted; but of the features of Mr. Quatterly he knew nothing.

Mr. Muzzlewell began the examination in the true justice-of-peace style of that day, by exclaiming, "Well, prisoner, what have you got to say for yourself?"

"Nothing, sir," answered Jack Williams sharply; "but that I think it devilish hard a man can't walk along the streets peaceably and honestly without being collared by a constable, just, I suppose, because at one time of my life, when I was a mere boy, I was fond of a little poaching; but if there is law in the land I'll know whether you've all a right to do this."

Frustrated in this quarter, Mr. Muzzlewell

had recourse to the constable. "Well, Higginthorp," he said, "what have you got to say to this? Why did you take this man in charge?"

"Why, your worship," replied the constable, "I took him in charge and the fellow asw as with him, on account of a deposition made this morning by a cessuary before the fack, in regard to a notorious robbery as was to have been committed last night at a place called Mallington Hall, in this county."

"As was to have been committed!" said Dr. Western and Mr. Quatterly in the same breath. "Pray, Mr. Muzzlewell," continued the reverend gentleman, "does your constable mean to say that the robbery was not committed, then?"

"'Pon my life, I don't know what he means to say," replied Mr. Muzzlewell, with a look of bewilderment; "there he is, ask him."

"I mean to say, your worship," said Mr. Higginthorp, taking the explanatory part of the matter upon himself, "that it was to have been committed, and mought have been committed too, for that matter, for aught that I can say; but of that I knows nothing. But the charge I brings against the prisoners is, that whether they were guilty of robbery or not, that is clear by the deposition of a cessuary before the fack, that they were compounding a felony."

Mr. Quatterly gave a merry glance along the bench, chucking heartily, and then observed aloud, "I suppose by compounding of felony he means laying a scheme to rob a house."

"That's it! You've hit it, my buck!" cried Mr. Higginthorp. "But what does it signify talking, there's the deposition taken down by myself, and witnessed by Neddy. There you can read it for yourselves. 'The deposition of John Blackmore, gardener'—I've got the boy in the lock-up, and we can examine him presently; and mind, I used no inducements; I told him all the time he was as likely to be hanged as not."

The paper was handed to the magistrates, and by the magistrates to their clerk, who proceeded to read it in a dosy, nasal tone, which brought out all the rich absurdities of Mr. Higginthorp's peculiar style and orthography in the most prominent manner. Mr. Quatterly was enchanted. But the whole business seemed so absurd that it produced on his mind an opinion rather favourable to the prisoners than otherwise, especially as he knew from what he had seen of Mr. Higginthorp's practice, on the preceding night, that he was a person very likely to use somewhat extraordinary measures to extract from young John Blackmore the confession before them.

As soon as Williams had heard it read, and perceived the sole grounds upon which his apprehension had taken place, he saw the necessity of making a bold effort to slip out from amongst the claws of justice before fresh facts were brought against him. Assuming, therefore, a frank and innocent tone, he exclaimed, "It's all a lie—that is to say, not altogether a lie either,

for there is some truth in it. There was a talk of there being a great lot of money in Mallington Hall, and what people might get by breaking in. But I remember quite well that I said that most likely they'd get their necks twisted if they did. Why the devil didn't the boy put that down? Well, then, it's true enough that I did send the young blackguard over on horseback to tell Mr. Latimer that all the business was found out about his having carried off Mr. Morton from Mallington, and that the story of his being a madman wouldn't do. And I did come over myself, with Tom Brown, to help him out of the scrape, for I knew that cowardly scoundrel called Tankerville would only get him in farther and farther. But we didn't come all the way in a gig, though, for the horse got rusty, and backed into a chalk pit on the road, and Tom and I had just time to get out before the devil went over, gig and all, and there they lie now, if the knackers haven't got hold of them."

"And pray what did you do after you came to Mr. Latimer?" asked Dr. Western. "This was on Saturday night, I think."

"Yes, sir," answered Williams; "Saturday night, hard upon twelve. Why, when I got to Mr. Latimer's, I found him in a great fright from the message I had sent him over, and expecting to have the magistrates upon him every minute, and yet as he had promised to marry poor Lucy

Edmonds on this morning—which he did by the way, and I was present at the wedding, which wasn't like as if I had committed a robbery last night."

"Certainly not," said Dr. Western.

"Well, your reverence," continued Williams, "I told him the best plan was for him to come away with me and Brown at once, and to have Mr. Morton let out the next morning, and then, perhaps, there would be no more said about it; and I told him I would show him where he could stay over Sunday, and he could come back early on Monday morning and marry Lucy, and be off again. But I didn't take him down Mallington way, you may be sure, when I wanted to get him out of your way, sir. We went t'other side, quite away towards London, and stayed all night at the Wheatsheaf, not far this side St. Albans. Then this morning we came back again. We set off about four o'clock, and walked along till just about daybreak, or thereabouts, we stopped at the Chequers, a mile or so upon the road, and had a glass of ale each. You can send and ask the landlord—I don't know what his name is. Well, then, there's another thing I remember, which will show that I am telling the truth. Just coming into the town from the London side, there's a hosier's shop, and the man of the shop was opening it with his boy as we came by, and we stopped for a minute to ask him what was the best inn for us to go to, because Mr. Latimer



didn't choose to go home, for fear of being caught about Mr. Morton's business, and I am sure the hosier will remember seeing us, for he looked at us devilish hard."

"We will send for these two men—the landlord of the Chequers, and Mr. Gimp, the hosier," answered Mr. Muzzlewell; and then he added, with a warning shake of the head, "Higginthorp, Higginthorp, you have been too sharp again, I fancy."

But at the same time Mr. Quatterly took out his watch, and observing to Dr. Western that it was quite time they should be gone, turned round to hold a short conversation with the magistrates in regard to what was to be done.

"If I may be permitted to suggest, gentlemen, as I term it," said Mr. Quatterly, "the best plan for you to follow is, to take all the evidence you can get here, and then to remand the prisoners till to-morrow for further information. The man tells his story well; but there's something—something—something—that I don't like;" and he shook his head, at each something, very suspiciously. "However, as Dr. Western and I are going direct to Mallington, we can, within six hours at the farthest, send you information whether Mallington Hall has really been robbed or not; and it will be no great harm to remand the two worthy gentlemen till to-morrow morning."

Thus speaking, Mr. Quatterly, accompanied by



Dr. Western, withdrew, the magistrates promising to follow all his suggestions.

Oh, promises, promises! pie-crust is adamant to you, and puff-paste is not more fragile. Soon after Mr. Quatterly and Dr. Western had rolled out of the town, the landlord of the Chequers, Mr. Gimp the hosier, and young John Blackmore himself were brought down to the magistrates' room. The first two fully corroborated Williams's statement, and the third, on being confronted with the prisoners, was seized with a violent fit of trembling, and on Williams demanding in a stern tone "What the devil he meant by telling such lies of him?" John Blackmore burst into tears like a great baby, declared that he had thought it was the intention of Mr. Higginthorp to starve him to death, and that he had made the deposition for the sake of a roll and a basin of cocoa.

In vain Mr. Higginthorp vowed and protested that he had used no inducements. He was too well known as a sharp practitioner for his word to be fully believed, and the magistrates, forgetting their promise to Mr. Quatterly, and thinking the case quite clear, ordered Williams and Brown immediately to be set at liberty, and young John Blackmore to be set in the stocks, an implement which was still in use at that time.

## CHAPTER XIII.

DR. WESTERN told his story truly and fully to his fellow magistrates, as it has been detailed in the preceding chapter ; but he could tell no more than he knew, and the magistrates naturally concluded that, as he himself believed, Jack Williams and Thomas Brown were safely lodged in custody in the little town of ——. Where were they by the time that Dr. Western had finished his statement? That you shall hear by-and-by. The personage, however, against whom the strongest motives for suspicion existed was evidently at liberty, and probably afar, and it was proposed that he should be immediately pursued. Neither Mr. Quatterly, however, nor the worthy rector had heard the directions given to the post-boy who drove Alfred Latimer and his poor bride ; it was necessary, therefore, to despatch information to the town of ——, of all that had been discovered at Mallington ; and it was proposed to mount Harry Soames on horseback and send him off at once. But the constable was growing hungry, and, stepping

forward, he observed that Bill Maltby was already in custody ; that he certainly knew something of the affair, and as he did not think that he was a principal, it was very probable he would give valuable information if rightly questioned. A nice piece of toasted cheese in a mousetrap never proved more tempting to one of the sleek long-tailed denizens of the skirting-board than did this suggestion to Mr. Middleton. He declared that they ought not to send over incomplete information when they had the means of rendering it perfect, and though Mr. Quatterly urged that delays were dangerous, and hinted that there was never any knowing what country magistrates might do, having a shrewd suspicion that worthy Mr. Muzzlewell would mismanage the affair, yet Mr. Middleton persisted in his desire to examine Bill Maltby, and Sir Simon Upplestone, ever bearing in mind that the foxhounds would meet next morning, determined to seize the precious moment to insure that the following day was not wasted on magisterial business when so much more important avocations were before him in the field. Mr. Quatterly rubbed his hands, chuckled, and looked at his friend Morton with a sly glance, whispering

“ Bye baby hunting,  
Daddy’s gone a hunting.”

But, notwithstanding jest or remonstrance, Harry Soames was sent to bring Bill Maltby

before the magistrates, who amused themselves during the twenty minutes he was gone, by discussing the whole particulars of the affair to very little purpose.

At the end of the time I have mentioned, Maltby was brought into the room, handcuffed, pale in the face, and bearing craven in every line and feature. Harry Soames had taken care to frighten him well as he came, eager, for his own credit's sake, to drive him to confession. In the tenderest and most friendly manner he had insinuated everything that was likely to create fear. He had talked of hanging, had expatiated upon gallowses; he had spoken a whole essay upon ropes.

Thus prepared, Maltby appeared before the magistrates with his heart in the soles of his feet, and Mr. Middleton immediately commenced the examination in the usual style. "Pray, Mr. Maltby," he said, "give an account of yourself from half-past eleven o'clock last night till one o'clock this morning?"

Bill Maltby was silent, not from anything like obstinacy, but from the very opposite condition of mind—doubt and hesitation.

"Do you choose to answer, or do you not, sir?" demanded Mr. Middleton; and Dr. Western added, "The law does not require you, prisoner, to say anything that may criminate yourself. With this information, it is for you to judge whether you will speak or not."

"I 'd speak willingly enough," answered Maltby, "if I were promised to be king's evidence."

"That cannot be promised by us," said Dr. Western, speaking before Mr. Middleton could put in his word. "It must depend upon the crown, and I can hold out no hope to you of such being the case, especially if, as your words seem to imply, you have been a principal in the horrible crime which last night disgraced the country. Doubtless, there will be sufficient evidence of all the facts without yours."

"No, no!" cried the young man eagerly; "I'm no principal—I had nothing to do with the robbery—I was never in the house; and sooner than be thought a principal, I'll tell the whole just as it happened."

"Remember," continued Mr. Middleton, something in the style of Mr. Higginthorp, "we hold out no inducement, we make no promises."

"Well, it don't signify," answered Maltby; "I'll tell the whole truth, and perhaps it may be taken into consideration."

He did not keep his word, however, in respect to telling the whole truth, for cowardice is ever apt to take its basest course—that of lying—when opportunity offers; and Maltby, though he related every circumstance that could criminate Williams, Brown, and Alfred Latimer, suppressed or distorted all that could aggravate his own offence. But, unfortunately for him, nobody be-



lieved one portion of his story. Mr. Quatterly took no part in the examination, but smiled once or twice at the colouring which the young man gave to his own share in the transaction, and observed to Morton, "If he don't mend his story it won't stand cross-examination. He'll trip, for a hundred guineas, at the first five questions. Cross-examination has this advantage: that, though I have seen many a very honest man tell a dozen lies in a minute without knowing it, simply from puzzle and confusion, yet I never saw a liar who was such a complete master of his trade as to stand against it for ten minutes."

As soon as the investigation was over, Mr. Middleton proposed to commit the prisoner, on his own showing, as an accessory before the fact; but, at the suggestion of Mr. Skinner, he was remanded till after the coroner's jury could be assembled.

The magistrates then adjourned, and Mr. Middleton, well contented with himself and with the important part he had played, was quite placable and courteous to every one else, but more especially to Mr. Morton, who was rising vigorously in his good graces, upon the strength of being the proprietor of the Mallington Park estate.

Although Morton's mind was not of a character to bear rancour, and although he held Mr. Middleton too lightly to retain any lengthened indignation for his conduct, yet the contempt



that he felt for that worthy person was an effectual bar to anything like cordiality on his part. A stiff bow, a word or two of common-place, was all that Mr. Middleton's civilities could extract from him; and it is a truth which even narrow and vulgar minded men feel more or less, that, when a gentleman and a man of sense answers you with common-places, he has a very low opinion of your mind or your character. Indeed, you may almost always judge of the estimation in which you are held by another from the conversation which he addresses to you.

Thus rebuffed, Mr. Middleton took his departure, mentally calling Morton a proud puppy, whereas before he had called him a low scamp. The witnesses were suffered to depart. Mr. Skinner bundled up his papers and withdrew, and Sir Simon Upplestone, advancing to Mr. Morton, frankly apologised for having entertained the suspicions which had been instilled into him, saying, with a laugh and a glance at Mr. Quatterly, "We poor country squires, sir, know no better, and are strongly inclined to suppose every Londoner a rogue."

Morton shook him by the hand, for he liked his folly better than the other's. "Don't think of it any more, Sir Simon," he said; "we shall be neighbours, and I trust good neighbours, too; so, according to the old saying, we will let bygones be bygones, and look upon each other differently for the future."

"Sue out a *venire de novo*, and try the cause again," said Mr. Quatterly; and Sir Simon, not quite understanding what he meant, took his leave and his departure.

Left in possession of the back drawing-room, Mr. Morton, Mr. Quatterly, and Dr. Western gave a few minutes' consideration to all that had occurred, and then proceeded into the next room in search of Louisa, whom they found weeping alone. The worthy rector comforted her to the best of his ability, and Louisa, though she could not recover altogether from the shock and horror which the events of that morning had produced, wiped away the tears from her eyes, and besought her venerable friend to go and endeavour to give consolation and support to Mrs. Charlton, saying, "She needs it much more than I do, my dear sir, and me she of course will not see. I went to her dressing-room just now because I thought it right, but, as I expected, she refused to admit me."

"She is very wrong in many respects," replied Dr. Western; "but, perhaps, is only the more in need of comfort and advice from the fact of being torn by angry passions, as well as assailed by misfortune. I will go to her for a short time, my dear."

Thus saying he retired; but returned in a few minutes, saying, "She will not see me; and, indeed, I think her mind seems almost deranged by these terrible events: for she sent out word, that we were all in a conspiracy against her, and that the

sooner we were out of the house the better. You, my dear young friend," he continued, turning to Morton, "cannot of course remain here; and you had better come down to my homely dwelling, and remain there till your affairs are settled."

But Morton shook his head. "I think, my dear sir," he replied, "that had better not be. I have watched Mrs. Charlton narrowly for some time, and I fear that she will speedily render a residence in the same house with herself impossible to this dear girl. Under these circumstances, it will be as well that she should have a place of refuge always at hand; and I see none to which she could possibly fly with propriety but to your roof, till such time as our marriage can take place, and therefore it will be better for me to take up my lodging as before at the inn."

"Always just and thoughtful," answered the clergyman. "And if Louisa thinks it right to come with me at once, I will go home with her before I proceed to the park."

"No," answered Louisa Charlton, with her bright eyes filling; "I will endure as much as I can first. It shall not be my fault, if I do not remain to comfort and to soothe her."

"Good, dear girl!" said Dr. Western, pressing her hand in his. "Do your duty always, my love; it will have its reward. I shall come up, however, in the evening to see; and I suppose, my dear sir, you and I will meet in the course of the afternoon."

“Undoubtedly,” answered Morton.

Mr. Quatterly taking his departure with the worthy rector, the lovers were left alone for a few minutes. Had anything been needed to draw the hearts of Louisa Charlton and of Morton closer together, it would have been found in the conversation which followed, sorrowful and painful as it was; for though passion may rise up in the midst of gay and happy scenes, love that is watered by tears is generally the strongest and the finest plant. But they were not permitted to enjoy for any length of time even the happiness of being alone together.

Scarcely had the clergyman and the solicitor been gone ten minutes when Mrs. Charlton's maid entered, and, with as hort courtesy to Morton, said, “I have a message from my mistress, sir. She says that, considering all things, and the state of the house, she thinks it very improper you should be here, and begs you would not trouble yourself to stay any longer.”

A slight cloud came over Morton's brow; but he repressed every angry feeling, and replied, “Give my compliments to Mrs. Charlton, and tell her that, imagining that my society would not be pleasant to her at the present moment, I was prepared to depart when her message came; which I wish she had spared herself the pain of sending, and me of receiving.”

“Very well, sir,” replied the woman, in almost a saucy tone; but she still lingered in the room,

till Louisa, turning round with a look of surprise, said, " You may go."

" My mistress said, ma'am," replied the woman ; but Miss Charlton stopped her, saying, " Understand, Margaret, that in some things, at least, I am mistress of this house ; and I tell you to go."

Her tone was perfectly calm, but firm ; and the maid did not venture to disobey, but carried back to Mrs. Charlton the information that Miss Louisa had turned her out of the room, saying, she was mistress of the house, and would not have her stay.

Mrs. Charlton started up from off the couch on which she was lying, with rage in every feature, exclaiming, " Mistress of the house, is she ? Well, that may be ; but she shall find that I am mistress of her fate ;" and she took two or three steps towards the door. Thought came in the midst of passion, and she paused. She recollected what might be the consequences if, as she at first intended, she instantly came to a rupture with Louisa, and quitted Mallington House. Visions of importunate creditors came before her—of privation, discomfort, and annoyance ; and, turning back to the sofa again, she put her handkerchief to her eyes, saying, " It is not worth while to grieve myself more than I am grieved already."

" I dare say he will not be long before he goes, ma'am," observed the maid.

" See, and let me know when he does," replied Mrs. Charlton ; and in two or three minutes more



the woman returned with the welcome tidings that Mr. Morton was gone. The worthy lady immediately rose again, and proceeded to the drawing-room, with the full determination of tormenting her step-daughter to the utmost of her ability, and it was great. She resolved, indeed, to put a certain degree of restraint upon herself, in order not to raise the spirit of resistance; but to say everything that was cutting and unkind, to point every insinuation and inuendo in the calmest and meekest manner, to assume the airs of the injured and the patient, but to lose no opportunity of stinging where she dared not bite, and to utter words and imply suspicions which she fancied would poison Louisa's rest for many a day to come. She was met, however, in a different way from that which she expected. Judging from herself, she had supposed she would be able to irritate the poor girl into saying something that would put her in the wrong. But with Louisa pity triumphed over every other feeling, and she met everything with gentleness and calmness which for long placed Mrs. Charlton at fault; it was done without effort, too, for it sprang from the real feelings of her heart. She could not be angry with one whom she supposed to be suffering so deeply. Thus passed by several hours, during which Mrs. Charlton only made herself more wretched, without ruffling Louisa's temper. The good lady, however, had somewhat over-calculated her own powers of self-control. Had she



succeeded in provoking Louisa to one rash word or angry expression, she would have remained meek and enduring as a saint, for she would have been so far gratified. But her step-daughter's patience and mildness irritated her every instant more and more; and at length, losing all self-command, she gave way to a vehement burst of passion, in which she poured forth accusations, and even insults, in a tone that alarmed her fair hearer for her intellect.

For the first time since Morton's departure Louisa wept, and in the midst of her tears, and while Mrs. Charlton was still giving vent to the torrent of her rage, the door was thrown open, and Dr. Western announced. He was close behind the servant, and had the excellent lady full in sight before she was aware of it. He heard the fierce and bitter words she uttered; he saw the angry hatred and defiance of her looks and gestures, and he soon made up his mind as to what was to be done.

For her own part, Mrs. Charlton saw that she had been caught in the fact, and that it would not do suddenly to change her voice and manner the moment that Dr. Western entered. She, therefore, went on in the same strain, but even more violently than before, saying, "Base unworthy girl! Is it not enough that by a foul conspiracy you have attempted to take away my son's life, and now you treat me with contumely and contempt, almost giving me orders to quit your house,

which, if your father's directions had been followed by those who drew up his will, would have been mine, not yours."

"I said nothing of the kind," replied Louisa, endeavouring to wipe away her tears; "and can assure you that no such thought ever entered into my mind. I only insisted upon a servant leaving the room who thought fit to intrude upon me after I told her to go, and that was hours ago."

"Oh! I dare say you will make your story good," exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, seeing her turn her eyes to Dr. Western. The heiress has plenty of partisans, no doubt; but I must say that I wonder that I am subjected to intrusion now, when I have expressed a wish for peace and thought on such a terrible day as this."

"My dear madam," said Dr. Western, "I did not intend to intrude upon you. My visit was to Miss Charlton, and I must say I am glad that I came up this moment, as you do not seem to be enjoying the peace you mention, and I think if you will listen to me for a few moments, I can show you where peace is only to be found."

"If I do not obtain it, it is all her fault," replied Mrs. Charlton. "She has been the bane of my existence—a serpent in my path. I do not wish to listen, Dr. Western, I have no desire to be preached to; when I want your ghostly advice or consolation I will ask for it; and as your visit is to the heiress, I shall leave my drawing-room to your disposal."

“That is quite unnecessary,” replied the clergyman. “This dear girl and I will have plenty of opportunity of conversing in another place. Louisa, my dear, you must come with me to the rectory till Mrs. Charlton’s mind is somewhat more composed. You can send up to your maid for anything that you want, and as my carriage is at the door, you had better get your bonnet and come at once.”

This was a blow that Mrs. Charlton had not expected. It did not at all suit her plans and purposes, and, instantly altering her tone, she exclaimed, “What! then I am to be deprived of all society and comfort?”

Dr. Western was provoked. “Madam,” he said, “I can be depriving you of nothing that you can wish to retain, when I take one whom you have pronounced the bane of your peace, and the serpent in your path;” but the next instant his heart smote him for what he had said, and, though he was resolved to execute his purpose, and firmly repeated his request to Louisa to get ready to accompany him, he added to Mrs. Charlton, as soon as she was gone, “I think, my dear madam, that Miss Charlton’s absence for a few days, till you have recovered your usual command of yourself, is absolutely necessary to the preservation of those feelings between you which I hope may soon be restored, and never again interrupted.”

“Oh, very well, sir—very well!” exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, rising. “I see it all—I under-

stand it all ! The scheme is plain enough, but it shall not succeed ; for, thank God ! I have power to stop it—and power which I will use, too. So, don't let her triumph too soon, pray ;” and, thus saying, she turned and left the room without waiting for a reply.

## CHAPTER XIV.

It may be well supposed that the little town of Mallington had been in a state of excitement and consternation during the whole morning; and when they have neither a billiard-room, a reading-room, a club, or a coffee-house in a place, where can people go to compare notes, receive information, and manufacture rumours, so well as to the principal inn or public-house in the neighbourhood? The bar, the commercial room, and the passage were filled with the inhabitants of Mallington and its vicinity, and round the door were collected a considerable number of persons who had an objection to spending their money upon ale, wine, or brandy and water.

Through the midst of all these Mr. Morton passed with his friend, Mr. Quatterly, and they all turned round to stare at him as they went, for they were all aware by this time that he had been accused of robbery and murder, and whatever it was that they expected to see, they were certainly considerably surprised by his calm,



placid, and self-possessed demeanour, as he walked on, unconscious of the attention he was attracting.

"Well, madam," said Mr. Quatterly, tapping the landlady familiarly on the shoulder; "Well, Mrs. Pluckrose"—and immediately deviating, as was sometimes customary with him, into an abominable pun, he added, "though, indeed, my dear lady, I think your name ought to be put into the plural, for you must have plucked two roses to blush so brightly on either cheek. But to return. Has anybody been here this morning inquiring for me? If so, I hope you have kept him.

"Oh! yes, sir," replied Mrs. Pluckrose, dropping a courtesy, "there are two gentlemen waiting for you. I took the liberty of putting them into Mr. Morton's sitting-room, because the house is so full."

"Not so full as to prevent my having a bed in it, Mrs. Pluckrose?" said the worthy solicitor; but the landlady reassured him on that point, and Mr. Morton and his friend walked up stairs, where they found waiting a middle-aged gentleman, who looked very much like a solicitor, and a younger man, bearing a strong resemblance to a clerk. There was a great blue bag upon the table before them, and the solicitor looked out of the window, while the clerk sat with his hands on his knees.

"Ah, Mr. Writham!" said Mr. Quatterly, rolling into the room as fast as his small legs would

carry him, "I hope I have not kept you waiting, for we had a little magisterial business to go through here. Indeed, I did not expect to see you yourself; a clerk would have done."

"Oh! nothing like one's own presence, my dear sir," answered Mr. Writham, who had a peculiarly clear, sharp, ferret-like expression of countenance, with a long, pointed nose, the very look of which would have made a flaw in a piece of parchment. "I came down to say, that the whole may be considered as definitively settled and agreed, upon the basis laid down between us at our last conference; always provided, nevertheless——"

"Anything hereinbefore contained to the contrary, notwithstanding," said Mr. Quatterly, laughing. "I thought there was an exceptional clause, friend Writham. Well, what is it? Out with it, man! We'll soon deal with it."

"It is simply this, my dear sir," answered Mr. Writham, "and you will own that it's quite reasonable; namely, that your client—I presume that I have the honour of being in his presence—do produce lawful and sufficient proof of the marriage of Henry Morton Wilmot and Maria dei Pazzi, and also of the death without issue of Charles Francis Wilmot."

"Oh! the latter is easily proved," replied Mr. Quatterly; "and, besides, with that you have nothing to do; for if he did leave legitimate issue, it would bar your client as well as mine. Besides, I never heard of a boy seven years old having a

son and heir. The law does not contemplate such a case, Mr. Writham ; and we can prove his birth and his death, with an interval of seven years between them. As to the other matter, it is quite right that you should have the proof you require, and you shall have it. There may be a little delay, from an awkward event which has removed the certificate to some distance."

Mr. Writham pricked up his ears, for there seemed to him a chance of pleading still ; and he observed in a solemn tone, " Of course, Mr. Quatterly, proof is necessary. Full, legal, indubitable proof."

" And proof you shall have, my dear Writham," answered Mr. Quatterly, " full, legal, indubitable proof, as you say ; for where we got the one certificate we can easily get another, even if the first should be lost. But by your good leave, my friend, we will draw up a little memorandum of the grounds on which we stand, stating the proofs and particulars that you require, and guarding against any future demands." Mr. Writham seemed to pause and hesitate ; but Mr. Quatterly went on in a decided tone, saying, " It is absolutely necessary, Writham ; it must be done, my friend : either sign and get your costs, or don't sign and go without them. I'm a solicitor, too, you know, Writham ; and one time I had a window broken in my house. A glazier was sent for, who put in the pane. Just when he had done I unfortunately walked into the room, and saw him neatly starring

the next pane with his diamond, then placing his finger dexterously against it till it gave a crack. I thought to myself, 'What an image of a solicitor!' We are all fond of making little holes, that we may mend them afterwards. It's the very nature and essence of our profession, Writham," and he took his fellow practitioner by the arm and gave him a friendly shake.

Mr. Writham did not attempt to resist his eloquence. The paper was drawn up by Mr. Quatterly's own hands. Mr. Writham suggested some alterations; they were discussed, and some were rejected, while others were admitted; after which the paper was signed. When the whole business was concluded, Mr. Quatterly began to feel the inconvenience of his brother solicitor having been shown into that room. He was naturally of a hospitable and jovial disposition; and he would have liked very well to ask Mr. Writham to dine with him at Mallington; but then he wanted a little private conversation with Morton. Mr. Writham, however, relieved him from his difficulty, by declaring that he must be off to London as fast as possible, as he had at least a hundred and fifty pieces of business to transact on the following day; and accordingly, as soon as a postchaise could be procured, away he went, taking his clerk and his blue bag along with him.

As soon as he was gone, Mr. Quatterly entered upon business with his friend. "This certificate

must be procured somehow, my dear sir," he said. "It may be difficult and unpleasant to wait for journeys to and from Italy; and yet how we are to get it without sending, I do not perceive. You look mighty cool and indifferent; but I can tell you if the exhibition of this document be long delayed, it may encourage these people to plead; and then Lord have mercy on your purse!—for it will be a fight with them for life or death—or for costs or no costs, which comes to the same thing."

"I am not at all indifferent, my good friend, I assure you," answered Morton; "but, nevertheless, I feel very sure that we shall obtain the paper speedily. I know it to be in the hands of the fellow Williams. Most likely he has not destroyed it before he was apprehended, as you have stated, for the only thing he could gain by it would be by keeping it; and, therefore, doubtless, it will be found amongst the rest of the things which he may have thought fit to leave behind. I suppose we shall soon have over some intelligence from Mr. Soames, the constable, and you can send over directions to stop all that belongs to me."

"That shall be done—that shall be done!" answered Mr. Quatterly; "but still I can't help regretting that the paper is not forthcoming at once. I see risk and inconvenience, and a great deal of law; and no one who knows much of the fresh eggs of Mrs. Themis, can doubt that the sooner



they are hatched the better ; for if they are left alone for a night, a thousand to one they are found addled the next morning."

"That is not a very consolatory view of the case," answered Morton ; " but still I do not see, my excellent friend, how I can help myself. There is an old saying, which you of all men must be well acquainted with that, ' what is done cannot be undone.' "

" Oh, yes ! I love old sayings," answered the worthy solicitor, " some for being wonderfully good and true, and some for being wonderfully bad and false ; though, probably, they were all true when they were first said, otherwise Solomon must have been a fool, and many a wiser man than he much in the same case. Now, for instance, men say that ' honesty is the best policy ; ' and it would be true at all times, if they had added the words ' here or hereafter ; ' but as the proverb stands, upon my life, I believe there is nothing more false. An honest man always makes much less noise in the world than a rogue ; and as the only way to get on in life is to make a noise in the world, the rogue has the better chance. Look at poets, philosophers, statesmen, soldiers—you will always find that those who have done the most good have been the least rewarded. Write lascivious verses and immoral odes, and your contemporaries crown you with immortality—the public purchase, and the minister honours. Inculcate virtue, try to amend and correct, and



starve in a garret, or die in a madhouse. Set up for infidel, and you're raised above Locke and Newton. Be a true Christian philosopher, and you are passed by as a twaddling canter. So with statesmen, so with soldiers, so even with lawyers. A rogue has a thousand paths he may follow to distinction, an honest man but one. Rogues for ever, friend Morton! But I'm getting misanthropical and you fidgetty; so tell me what you are going to do, noble sir, and I'll be no clog to you."

"First, my dear sir," replied Morton, "I am going over to Mallington Hall, in order to see something of the scene of such sad events, and to visit the poor widow of the murdered man; then I am going to return here, by your leave, to dine with you upon such fare as Mrs. Pluckrose can furnish; and then I shall go and drink tea with good Dr. Western and his sister."

"Where you expect to meet somebody else," said Mr. Quatterly. "Well, then, my young friend, my afternoon is laid out also. First, I will walk over with you to Mallington Hall, if you have no objection; then I will return here with you and dine; then I will amuse myself by writing a few letters, and making a few notes, till it is time to go to what the young people call Bedfordshire. Thus will you and I both consult our convenience; I shall not be in your way, and you will not be in mine. But pray order the dinner before you go, or else we shall have to

wait for a full hour after we come back. Now there is nothing so unpleasant on earth as waiting for an inn dinner.

Morton praised the punctuality of Mrs. Pluckrose, the greatest virtue of an innkeeper, but took his friend's advice, and after the dinner was ordered they both set out upon their expedition, although the day had become cloudy as the sun crossed the sky. Mr. Quatterly admired the whole scene very much. With the park he was peculiarly pleased, and noticed all those little beauties which well-directed art had added to nature, in a manner that would have delighted poor Edmonds, could he have heard his words.

"All that you so much praise, my dear sir," said Morton, "is owing to the exertions of one man, poor Edmonds, who lies murdered up at the house there. He was a fine specimen of that very fine creature the English peasant of the best class. Not without his peculiarities; he was perhaps, rather elevated by them than otherwise, for they were all of a fine and generous kind. He was blunt and straightforward. but never rude or insolent, and resolute to do his duty to his master, whether his master liked it or not; he was sometimes a little pertinacious, especially where the object required labour and exertion on his own part. There was a certain degree of sternness about him, but yet he was not without kindly and gentle feelings; and, indeed, from all

I have heard, I fear that his taking part with, and making excuses for, that wretched young man, Mrs. Charlton's son, when every one else avoided and condemned him, has been the means of bringing wretchedness to his home, and even death upon himself."

"A fine character, but a rare one in his class," said Mr. Quatterly.

"Nay, I do not think so," answered Morton; "I believe that there are more of such characters in England than we imagine, and that there would be more still if various circumstances in our state of society did not tend in different ways to brutalize them. It is with the classes above themselves that a great part of the fault lies wherever we find a rude and animal class of peasantry. I speak not of one class alone, but of all the classes above them in their degree, for the great proprietor has his share in producing the evil by the neglect of the means which God has put in his power for the purpose of removing it. But take two classes as examples—the farmer and the manufacturer. There are many individual exceptions, but in general they only seem to look upon those who labour for them, as machines by means of which they are to produce as much as possible at the least possible expense. They have no object in making them aught but machines, and a human machine is nothing but a teachable beast. In the manufactory he may become a well-drilled monkey; in the fields he

may be a bear; but no effort of any value is made to raise him, but, on the contrary, many to depress him in the scale of being. In some places we teach the people reading and writing, and so far we do well; but we rarely, if ever, address ourselves to teach them to think rightly, to reason justly, or to weigh moral against physical advantages; and all the time we show them by our own conduct that we use their exertions but for our own purposes, and, by paying not one penny more than we are obliged, keep them in that state of poverty and dependence which is the most brutalizing of all things; or, what is worse, perhaps, and more dangerous to themselves and society, prove to them that, in their communication with the classes above them, they receive nought but injury and wrong. Here, in this very case before us, a man in the rank and station of a gentleman is treated both respectfully and kindly by a person greatly superior to him in mind; and what does he inflict in return, first upon the daughter, and then upon the father?"

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Quatterly, with surprise, "you do not mean to say, that the poor girl I saw married this day to that young vagabond Alfred Latimer is the daughter of the murdered man."

"Yes, indeed," answered Morton; "and I know not whether to be sorry or to rejoice that the marriage has really taken place."

"Oh! rejoice, rejoice at all events," answered

Mr. Quatterly; "but, to say truth, this offers me the first reasonable cause for doubting the young man's guilt. Notwithstanding all my knowledge of human crime—and it is tolerably extensive, as I need not tell you—I can hardly believe it possible that a man, however depraved, should go and wed at the altar a woman with whose father's blood his hand was still wet. Truth, that most extraordinary thing, is the most difficult of all ores to extract from the immense mass of dross with which it is mingled, and in this case we may have got upon a wrong scent. Certainly the circumstances are very suspicious; but yet nothing is clearly proved. The young man may have been out upon some other wild expedition, the blood may have come upon his clothes in some other way; God grant it, and grant that it may be proved! for although we get at as much truth as perhaps can possibly be obtained by the means and appliances of our criminal law, yet, depend upon it, many a man is hanged for crimes he has never committed."

Morton was silent, for he knew more of Alfred Latimer's character than good Mr. Quatterly did, and he did not entertain the same hopes as his friend. In a few minutes after they approached the great door of the house by the gravel walk in front; but I will not pause to recount all that took place on Morton's visit to the Hall, or during that which he afterwards made to the park-keeper's cottage.



After spending two hours on the scene of such sad events, he and Mr. Quatterly returned to the village of Mallington and the inn, where the good landlady proved herself worthy of the commendations Morton had bestowed.

We will not stop to discuss the dinner which Mrs. Pluckrose set before her revered guests, nor descant upon the excellence of the roast chickens, nor the insufferable hardness of the bacon, by which they were accompanied. After the moderate meal was over, Morton left his companion for the evening, and once more took his way along the bank of the river from the inn to the rectory.

There are days in the life of every one when events crowd so thickly together that they jostle one another for attention, and a thousand subjects of deep interest were pressing upon our friend's mind at that moment; but yet a faint hope of seeing fair Louisa Charlton at the rector's passed through the rest, and made him hurry his steps. Nor was he deceived, for the first person he saw on entering was herself.

"I thought, dear Louisa," he said, "that you would be driven to this kind place of refuge. I hope you had not much to endure before you sought it."

"A great deal more than ought to have been inflicted upon her," replied Dr. Western, speaking for his fair ward. "But now, my dear sir, my sister and I will do our best to make her



happy whilst she remains with us. Yet I fear there are still a good many difficulties and discomforts to be encountered before her fate is more happily fixed."

"Discomforts, perhaps, many," replied Morton; "but difficulties, I trust, none, my dear doctor. Mrs. Charlton's opposition, I know, we must expect; but, if Louisa feels as I hope she does, that opposition need cause no delay whatever in our arrangements. The law must afterwards take its course, and pronounce how far we may be affected by the lady's decision. But, after a scene which took place this morning before you arrived, I think you will see that it is unnecessary for us to pay any attention to Mrs. Charlton's proceedings, as her opinion of me or any other person depends entirely upon our pliability in regard to certain views which seem to me not of the most honest character. However, of that hereafter."

The conversation now turned to other subjects, but still the events of the day formed, of course, the principal topic, and as all those events were sad—as they all showed, in different points of view, the depravity or folly of human nature, the general tenor of that evening's conference was somewhat gloomy. Yet Morton did not love Louisa less, and Louisa loved Morton, if possible, more, as that conversation came towards a close. The lighter things of life have their effect perhaps in first attracting, but it is when the deeper and the sterner draw forth the more profound

and precious qualities that the heart becomes knit to heart by ties that can never be broken: for the small traits and indications which are visible in ordinary society much more frequently afford a view into the faults and failings than into the virtues and excellencies of our companions.

As the hour of ten was approaching, Morton related to Dr. Western his visit to the widow of poor Edmonds, and the short conversation which had taken place between them. "I must ask you, my dear sir," he said, "who know so much more of her habits and feelings than I do, to turn in your mind what sort of position will be best suited for her. I will secure to her an independence; but I know that it will please her best, and I am sure that, under existing circumstances, it will be best for her, to have some employment for her leisure time. There are occasions, as we all know, when labour is a blessing; and such, I believe, it will be in her case. The boy we will easily provide for; and as to poor Lucy, I fear we must wait to see the course of events before we can devise anything for her benefit."

"I dread to think," said Dr. Western, feelingly, "what must be the effect on Lucy's mind when she knows the whole of this sad history."

"Oh, keep it from her!" cried Louisa. "If it be possible, never let her know the worst of all that has occurred."

Dr. Western shook his head. "It is the

saddest part of sin and crime, my love," he said, "that they bring misery to others who have no participation in them. You, yourself, my dear child, will have to bear your share of suffering from Alfred Latimer's errors, and this poor girl who is now his wife must endure her part of the same hard consequences. I see no possibility of preventing it. She must know of his apprehension, which will doubtless be speedily effected; and all the circumstances will, sooner or later, be heard, whatever be the result."

"I think it might be prevented," said Morton, after a moment's thought. "His apprehension, indeed, she must learn; but it seems to me possible that by some one stepping forward to protect her in her unprotected state the darkest fact of all—if it be a fact—that her husband was an actual participator in her father's murder, may be concealed from her."

"You say, if it be a fact, my dear sir," replied Dr. Western, "and you speak in a tone of doubt. Has anything occurred to make you hope that the opinions we formed this morning are groundless?"

"Little," answered Morton. "Mr. Quatterly, indeed, has doubts; but it seems to me —"

While he was speaking there was a good deal of bustle in the rector's hall; much more, indeed, than that usually quiet and well-regulated place was at all accustomed to. Voices sounded, speaking low and eagerly, and the tones of Dr. Western's old

butler, usually so grave and calm, were at length heard rising powerfully.

"But I must and will see him this instant," cried one voice, which Morton thought he recognised.

"But I tell you you cannot see him till I let him know, and ask him whether he chooses or not."

"But I know he will choose, and see him I will this moment," rejoined the first speaker. "I tell you it's matter of life and death; and there's not a moment to be lost!"

There seemed to come then a little scuffle in the hall, in which the rector's butler, being the weakest, as usual, went to the wall, and the moment after, the door was thrown open. All eyes were turned towards it—on the part of Louisa and Mrs. Evelyn with some degree of fear—and instantly in rushed Mr. Gibbs in his own proper person, his usually neat and somewhat extravagant attire being a good deal deranged, his black and silken ringlets all confused and tumbled over each other like a mob of corkscrews; but importance and vigour in his countenance.

"Oh! sir," he said, addressing Morton, as soon as he perceived him; "I have such news for you, though it has well nigh cost me my life—come along—there is not a moment to be lost—we've got them safe if you like to have them."

Mr. Gibbs's mind was evidently over-excited, and Morton, fearing that he might come harshly

on some subject that would be painful to Louisa, beckoned him to come out of the room, saying, "I will speak to you in the library, Mr. Gibbs, by Dr. Western's permission."

"Let him come, too—let him come, too," cried Mr. Gibbs. "We shall want all the assistance we can get, I can tell you, sir; but there's not a moment to be lost if you intend to do anything effectual"—thus saying he followed Mr. Morton out of the room. Dr. Western accompanied him, and after they had been about ten minutes away together, the bell of the library was heard ringing, and several of the men servants were called into the room.

## CHAPTER XV.

WE left Dr. Western, Mr. Morton, and the travelling perfumer all in the library together, ringing the bell; but, before we proceed to examine into the results of that phenomenon, we must inquire into the causes.

The first sentence, after their entrance, spoken was by Morton. "Well, Mr. Gibbs," he said, "what is all this? What have you discovered?"

"Why, I've got them, sir—I've got them!" cried Gibbs; "but there's no time to be lost if you want to have them."

"What do you mean, my good friend?" exclaimed Dr. Western. "Do you mean Mr. Latimer?"

"No, no, no!" cried the traveller, eagerly. "I mean the villains, the scoundrels, the chiefs of the whole gang, and I'm afraid every moment that they should get away."

"But give us some connected account of who they are, and what you mean?" said Mr. Morton, judging from the visitor's excited manner, soiled



and deranged dress, and whirling words, that he had drank too much. "We have already seen to-day, Mr. Gibbs, how unjustly suspicions may be entertained, and of course can do nothing without proper information."

"Well, then, if I must waste time," exclaimed the other, "all I have to say is that it is entirely owing to the Fragrant Balm of Trinidad. If it hadn't been for that I should never have known anything at all. As soon as ever I could get away this morning, I went over to Sturton, sir, where I made a very convenient deal, and as I was coming back through the wood, just at the top of the hill on this side of Sturton, where I could look down over all the country, I saw two men creeping up by one of the narrow paths, and, not liking their looks at all—for I thought I knew the villains—I went off as fast as I could. They came nearly as fast, and, as the mischief would have it, it grew quite dark in the wood, and down I fell, breaking my shin most desperately. Running was out of the question; if I lay there I was sure to be murdered; so I took to my old trick and got up the tree. I had not been there two minutes when the blood-thirsty villains passed underneath, and I held my breath, and listened with all my ears. Well, I heard one say to the other, 'I could have sworn I heard something running and the bushes shake;' and then the other answered, 'It's very likely a deer got out of the park; the pailing is very bad in some

places.' You may fancy how I trembled ; but then t'other one said, ' It was more like a man's foot than a deer's,' so that made me tremble more, till I thought they would hear me shaking. But then one said to the other, ' It's all quiet enough now, however ;' and the other answered, ' Ay, if it was any one, he's off by this time, and he couldn't be looking for us, at all events.' That was Jack Williams that spoke."

" Jack Williams!" exclaimed Dr. Western ; " why, I left him in the hands of the magistrates at ——."

" Ay! he's out, however it happened," answered Mr. Gibbs, " and Brown with him, too, doctor ; I'll take my oath of it, by the Fragrant Balm of Trinidad, and all I hold sacred ! I knew who they were pretty well when first I saw them, and then when I heard their tongues I was quite sure. Besides, they called each other by their names ; that is to say, Brown called him ' Williams,' and he called Brown ' Tom.'"

" But where are they, then?" demanded Morton. " It would take a whole regiment to search that wood properly, even if they are there still."

" They are there still," answered Gibbs ; " but they won't be there very long. As to searching the wood, that's needless ; for I can tell you exactly where they are, and where they intend to remain till two o'clock, for I heard all their arrangements just as plain as a sermon. They stopped a minute close under the tree, after they had said

what I have told you, as if they were listening ; and then Brown said to Williams, ‘ I don’t hear anything, Williams, do you?’ upon which Williams answered, ‘ No, Tom, I don’t; and at all events we had better get into the cave, for we must have some rest before we go on, and we are in less danger there than anywhere else.’ ‘ So I think,’ answered Brown ; ‘ but if I once fall asleep I’m not likely to wake in a hurry, for it’s a tolerable long walk I can tell you, Williams, with all the round we have made, and this bundle is devilish heavy. One of us had better keep awake whilst the other sleeps, and so take it in turns.’ But Williams replied, ‘ Never you fear, I shall wake at two o’clock. I always do ; for that’s the time I used to go up on watch. I must have some sleep, too, recollect ; for I’ve had none these three nights. And we mustn’t be much after two in starting again, that we may get on ten or twelve miles on the other side before daylight.’ ‘ Well, come along then,’ answered Brown, ‘ and let us have something to eat and drink first. It’s devilish little use having got the money, if we are forced to starve ourselves notwithstanding.’ After that they walked on a little, and I began to think how I should like to follow them, and see where the cave is they talked about ; but I very soon found that it was nearer than I thought ; for I could hear that they did not go along the path, but pushed through the trees and bushes near towards the high bank, and then they seemed to come to a

dead stop, for I could hear their voices talking again without seeming to move. They were far enough off to prevent me from knowing what they said, except when they spoke very loud ; but near enough to make me quite sure of whereabouts they were. Presently, too, there came a sort of crackling sound, and I could see a red light shining through the branches, which showed me that they had lighted a fire. The dogs did not know there was anybody so near, or I dare say they would not have made themselves so comfortable."

"This opportunity must not be lost," said Dr. Western, rising and ringing the bell. "We must secure these men if possible."

"It would do me a great deal of good, your reverence," said Mr. Gibbs, "if you would just let me have a glass of wine ; for, to tell the truth, I am somewhat tired, and a good deal exhausted, not having touched a bit of anything for a good many hours ; but still I am ready to go the minute the others are."

"You deserve high praise for your courage and activity, Mr. Gibbs," replied the worthy clergyman ; "and you shall have anything that you desire which the house can afford. Bring in some wine and some cold 'meat,'" he continued, as the servant appeared ; "but, first, tell the coachman to come here directly. Now pray, Mr. Gibbs, let us hear how you escaped from your very unpleasant situation in the tree."

"It was all owing to the Fragrant Balm of

Trinidad," replied his visitor; "for, having a specimen bottle in my pocket, as soon as I found that the murderers were safely lodged at such a distance as not to hear a little rustle, I took it out, and, pushing down my stocking, rubbed my shin till the pain quite went off, otherwise I couldn't have walked a step, I'm sure. I kept a sharp ear upon my friends in the cave, however, and rubbed and listened, and listened and rubbed, for full half an hour. But still they kept talking and eating I fancy, and I could hear a cork drawn, and then they laughed."

"Laughed!" exclaimed Dr. Western. "I am sometimes inclined to wonder how human beings ever laugh."

"It was Tom Brown, I think," returned Mr. Gibbs; "for I never saw Williams laugh in my life, and I don't think he ever does. But, some time after that, they began to be more silent, speaking for a minute or two, and then breaking off again; and then there came a word or two and an answer; and then they were still so long I thought they were both asleep; but then they began again, and so it went on till it must have been past nine, I dare say. After that all was quiet; but I dared not move for a full half hour, during which time I considered what I had best do; and gradually I began to take courage, and I determined to come down, and get across as fast as possible, for it was the nearest magistrate's house; and, as I grew bolder and bolder, I thought



I might just as well take a look at their cave before I went. And when I was quite sure they must be asleep, I got slowly down the tree from knot to knot, making no noise at all; and then crept quietly through the grass towards the chestnut-trees and bushes under the bank, making as near as I could for the spot where I had seen the light glimmering when I was up stairs in the tree, for I could not see it now for the brushwood, but I smelt it strong enough notwithstanding. I picked my steps like a cat over the wet ground; and presently, as I moved about, I spied a gap amongst the leaves and branches, not bigger than my hand, through which I saw something red shining, and, getting as near as I could, I peeped through.

“And what did you see?” asked Morton, as the coachman entered, followed by the footman with a tray of cold meat and wine in his hands, and Mr. Gibbs paused in his narrative.

“Why, I saw the fire of sticks beginning to die out,” replied Mr. Gibbs, “and that great big hulking fellow, Brown, lying upon his back with a bundle under his head, and Williams sitting with his back against the bank, and his head leaning forward, sound asleep. As I stood there, Brown began to snore. You thought it very horrible, sir, that such men should laugh, but I can tell you it’s very horrible indeed to hear a murderer snore; so, creeping away again without making the least noise, I marked one or two of the large trees near with my knife, and then came down

back again as fast I could to old Blackmore, the gardener's cottage. I had to knock the old man up out of his bed, for his boat was chained and padlocked; but when he saw me, and heard what I wanted it for—though I didn't tell him all—he let me have it willingly enough, and I punted myself across here without more ado. The boat is just down by the bank there, and I'm ready to go as soon as I have had something to refresh me a little."

While Mr. Gibbs proceeded with great self-possession and satisfaction to comfort himself with the good things set before him, a consultation took place between Dr. Western, Mr. Morton, and the coachman, as to what would be the best plan to pursue for the purpose of capturing the two malefactors, whose place of concealment had been discovered by the worthy traveller. Considerable difficulties, however, presented themselves. The lateness of the hour—the want of all preparation—the absence of the only constable that Mallington boasted—the distance of Dr. Western's house from the village—and the early period at which Williams and his companion were to start upon their onward journey—were all impediments which were difficult to overcome. Dr. Western was a man of peace; but, nevertheless, his sense of duty as a magistrate led him at first to resolve upon going in person, and it was with the greatest difficulty that Morton dissuaded him.

"I shall go, certainly, my dear sir," said the young gentleman himself, "you know that I have a personal stake in this matter; for, besides forwarding the ends of justice, I would fain secure the papers which one or the other of these men undoubtedly possess. But both your age and your profession, my dear sir, should prevent you from going; and, doubtless, we shall be able to get enough men by the way to render our proceedings secure."

"I don't know, sir," said the coachman, scratching his head; "but if you cross over in the boat you'll find nobody but old Blackmore, and he's too lame to be of any good. You and I and the gentleman there might be enough it's true; but, depend upon it, the fellows will fight like mad, for I suppose they've got a rope round their necks any how."

"Doesn't Miles, one of the keepers, live up at the corner of the park by Mrs. Hazlewood's cottage?" asked Morton; "we can easily take that in our way."

"Yes, sir, so he do," answered the coachman; "and a strapping chap he is too. I didn't think of him."

"Then we shall be enough, my dear sir," rejoined Mr. Morton, turning to the rector with a cheerful smile. "Four stout men will certainly be sufficient against two. Though any odds are justifiable in such a case, I should be almost ashamed of taking more. We had better have

some arms, however, if you have any in the house. If not, I must send for my pistols to the inn."

"Oh! the footman has a couple of brace in his pantry, and I have a long-unused gun up stairs," replied Dr. Western.

"I've got a pistol, too," said the coachman, and Mr. Gibbs chimed in, announcing that he had his two little barkers in his pocket, never having gone unprovided since his head had suffered in the very wood to which he was now destined. He started up at the same time, declaring himself quite ready; and, indeed, he showed a degree of alacrity and resolution which raised him high in the opinion of Mr. Morton. The gun and pistols were procured, and then a sufficient quantity of cord was sought for and cut to convenient lengths, with a portion of which each of the party furnished themselves.

"Now, go out with the coachman and down to the boat, Mr. Gibbs," said Mr. Morton, as soon as all was ready; "I will join you in a minute;" and then turning to Dr. Western, he added, "I will merely go and bid Louisa and Mrs. Evelyn good-evening. It will be much better, however, that they should know nothing of this affair till it is over, as it would only render them uneasy during the night, and poor Louisa has enough to grieve her without any further anxiety."

Dr. Western agreed cordially in this view, but at the same time he added, "You must return

and let me know, my dear sir, for I shall certainly sit up till it is all over."

Morton promised to do as he requested, and then entering the drawing-room, laughed with Louisa and Mrs. Evelyn for a moment over Mr. Gibbs's strange interruption, and merely added that he thought it would end in the capture of two notorious malefactors, took his leave with as light an air as if he were going to a party of pleasure.



## CHAPTER XVI.

THE moon had somewhat declined, the high slopes of the ground behind Mallington Park, the deep rounds of the wood in the foreground, even the lower part of the park itself, though turned to the south, were all in shadow; but yet the river in some of its bends caught the rays of the declining planet, and glistened like silver as it flowed along. The boat had been drawn up as near to the rectory as possible, where the stream, expanding, flowed on more gently, leaving a fringe of reeds, mingled with the large round leaves of the water lily, on that side of the river; and in the punt itself appeared, when Morton approached, the coachman and Mr. Gibbs. He concluded, of course, that they were waiting there for him; but, nevertheless, he could not, as he hurried on, divine with what amusement they were filling up their time; for the coachman, with his body slightly bent, and the pole in his hand, seemed very much in the attitude of one who was lifting out a large fish

with a landing net, while Mr. Gibbs, on his knees, in the bottom of the punt, was stooping over still further, and, reaching out his hands, apparently to secure something which his companion was endeavouring to guide to the side of their little bark.

Just when Morton came up the worthy traveller made a sharp grasp at something, exclaiming the moment after, "I have got it—it's a hat."

He then emptied the water out, and turning to the young gentleman as he stepped into the punt, he showed him his prize, saying "Here's a hat in the water, Isn't that funny, sir?—a very good hat, too, and can't have been long in, or it would have fallen to pieces."

"Keep it safely, Mr. Gibbs," answered Morton, who saw more in the fact than the other seemed to do. "There push off, coachman, as fast as you can. You had better, perhaps, mark the hat, Mr. Gibbs, for we must leave it in the boat, and it may be important to identify it."

"Here's something written in the inside already," answered the traveller, "if I could but make out what it is," and he turned it to the moonlight, but in vain. "I'll mark it at all events," he continued; taking out his pencil and making a broad cross on the leather. "There, that will prevent mistakes. I shouldn't wonder if it were that young Mr. Latimer's hat. He came back without one, they say, and took a new one with him."

Mr. Morton did not reply, and the punt soon glided into the darker part of the stream, and reached the opposite bank. Morton then led the way at once towards the cottage of the man Miles; but by this time it was past twelve o'clock, and the good countryman and all his family were sound asleep in their beds, whence it was very difficult to rouse them. At length after long knocking at the door, and tapping at the window, Miles himself awoke, and, as apprehension was the order of the day, and he did not choose to give such nocturnal visitors an opportunity of forcing their way in, he brought his face as near as possible to the casement, and opening it, inquired, "Who the devil are you?"

"Get on some clothes and come out, Miles," replied Mr. Morton. "Bring your gun with you, too, with a ball or two, fit for it, if you've got any."

"Lord bless me, sir! I didn't know you," answered the man in a respectful tone; but, rubbing his eyes heartily at the same time, "What's it all about?"

"I'll tell you presently," answered Morton; "but make haste, my good friend, for we have no time to lose."

The man retired, promptly threw on some clothes, and calling one of his little girls to shut the door after him, speedily appeared, with gun and powder-flask in one hand and some bullets in the other.

"You had better charge," said Morton, and the man obeyed without hesitation. Mr. Gibbs he stared at heartily, but recognised Dr. Western's coachman, and asked him how he did in a semi-somnambulous manner, while he went on cramming his gun.

"The French haven't landed, have they?" he asked at length, as he followed Morton up the sandy lane under the park wall.

"Oh! no," answered Morton. "We have not such serious enemies to deal with as that, my good fellow. We have discovered where two of the men are lying hid, who are suspected of having broken into Mallington Hall, and murdered poor Edmonds."

"Oh, d—n them!" cried the gamekeeper; "if I catch them I'll knock their brains out."

"No, no," answered Morton. "You must be so good as to follow your orders exactly. I'll tell you what to do, when we get near the spot, and you must do neither more nor less."

"Where be they?" asked Miles, in an eager tone, which showed that sleep was now quite thrown off. "In the chestnut wood, I'll bet any money."

"No," answered Morton; "in a cave or hollow piece of ground in Wenlock Wood, I understand."

"What! Gammer Mudge's Hole?" exclaimed Miles, stopping suddenly. "Well, that's the very place for them to hide, to be sure, I haven't been there this many a year, and I didn't think of it."

But stop a bit, stop a bit. If they are in there you'll want some light, for at the back part it's as black as the coal-hole, even in the day time, and we may all get our throats cut before we know it."

This was a point which had neither struck Morton, Mr. Gibbs, nor the coachman, and for a moment or two it puzzled them all very much.

Miles soon came to their relief. "I've got a dark lantern at home," he said. "You three go up to the common, at the back of the park, and I'll run and fetch it, and be up with you in a minute."

They reached the top of the hill, however, some time before they were overtaken by the game-keeper; and Morton took advantage of the opportunity to arrange his plan of operations.

"Two of us had better go in first," he said, "and two stay at the entrance, in case the others should miss them, and they should run out. As soon, however, as we have got hold of them the others can rush in to help."

"They were both close at the mouth," said Mr. Gibbs. "But who's to go in first?"

Morton mistook him, and thought that one of the qualms of apprehension which he acknowledged having felt in the tree, had now got possession of him again, and he accordingly replied, "You and the coachman had better stay the entrance, Mr. Gibbs; you can hold the lantern, so as to give us as much light as possible,



and knock any of them down that attempt to pass."

But the safety that is in numbers had inspired Mr. Gibbs with the spirit of a hero. "No, no, sir!" he exclaimed, "on my life that's not fair. I found the fellows out, and I ought to be allowed my part in taking them."

"So you shall, my good friend," replied Morton; "but only, as I think that Miles is a stronger man"—

"Oh! I'm stronger than I look," answered Mr. Gibbs, interrupting him, "and devilish active. Let me once get my fingers on one of their throats, and the fellow sha'n't throw me off."

"Well, so be it," answered Morton, who, recollecting that Miles was a married man, with a large family dependent upon him, thought it as well that the more dangerous part of the undertaking should fall upon the dapper traveller.

When the gamekeeper joined them, however, though he did not venture to express his dissent so boldly as Mr. Gibbs had done; yet he grumbled a little at the prospect of not being allowed, as he termed it, "to have a lick at the fellows who murdered poor Edmonds."

Morton replied, "You must remember that they are only suspected, my good friend, and, therefore, there must be no more violence than is necessary to secure them. Probably, however, we shall all have as much of it as we desire. So now that we understand the whole, let us go on

in perfect silence; and remember, Miles, not to unshade the lantern till we are close to the entrance of the cave. Step as quietly as possible also; and you, Miles, lead the way, as I suppose you know the place best."

"Know Gammer Mudge's Hole? Ay, that I do," answered the gamekeeper; "but what am I to do if I am not to go in when I get there?"

"You keep close to the right of the mouth. The coachman, who must come last, will keep close to the left, and Mr. Gibbs and I will go in between you as soon as you unshade the lantern."

"Very well, sir," answered Miles, "just as you like, though I think you had better leave it to us, in case harm should come of it."

"No, no," answered Morton. "I never put other men upon tasks that I am afraid to undertake myself. Now, go on, Miles."

The man led the way across the common till he reached the edge of Wenlock Wood; but then, instead of taking the path which Mr. Gibbs had followed once before, he struck away to the left, skirting the wood, till he came nearly to the spot where the high bank, in which the cave was dug, fell away into the broken ground of the common.

There the gamekeeper turned into the wood, where a somewhat broader and less entangled path was found, under the shelter of the sandy banks.

Slowly and cautiously they walked along,

keeping close to each other, and preserving a profound silence ; and it is vain to say that the sensation was not somewhat awful, as, in the depth of the night, with no other light but that afforded by the sky above, bright though it might be with the moon's rays, they walked on through the deep wood, and remembered that a strife was about to take place with men whose hands were already imbued in human blood, and who would, in all probability, struggle with the courage of despair. Every now and then, where the banks were a little lower, the moonlight poured from the south-east upon their path, streaming between the boles of the trees that crested the high ground above ; but those occasional glimpses of brightness tended rather to render the gloom more deep when the darkness succeeded.

When they had gone about a quarter of a mile a bird of the raven species—whether their steps had caught his watchful ear, or whether he was already on the wing, I cannot tell—flew over their heads with a hoarse croak, and they could hear the strong feathers of his wings flap amongst the branches. These were the only sounds they heard : all the rest was still and solemn, and silent ; not a breath of air was felt ; the thin branches of the birch waved not, and the light leaves of the aspen remained at rest. Their own step was all that moved, and each took especial care to tread as lightly as possible, and to hold the cautious breath. At length a faint odour of

burnt wood was perceptible, hanging about amongst the trees ; and Miles, turning partly round, touched Mr. Morton on the shoulder, as an intimation that they were approaching the place.

Morton instantly drew one of the pistols from his pocket and held it in his left hand, giving a sign to those behind him ; and, after taking about twenty steps further, the gamekeeper stood still. Though completely dark, and though the fire which Mr. Gibbs had seen had now gone out, Morton could perceive distinctly enough the dark outline of the mouth of the cave, and when Miles paused and faced round on the right-hand side, the young gentleman did the [same within about a yard of him. Mr. Gibbs also approached, and then Morton touched the gamekeeper as a signal to unshade the lantern. Just at the same moment there was a slight noise in the cave, as if some one moved ; but the covering over the lantern was instantly drawn back, and the figures of the two sleeping men were straight before them. The feeble rays penetrated faintly into the cave, showing near the entrance the rough smoke-begrimed sides, but suffering the further parts to rest in obscurity. They flashed full upon the faces of Williams and his companion, however, and while Brown rolled over uneasily on his side, but without waking, the former started at once upon his feet, exclaiming, " Ay, ay, sir !" as if suddenly called by some one in command over him.

Without giving him a moment's pause, Morton rushed in upon him and grasped him by the collar ; but even in the short interval, roused completely by the sound of feet, the miscreant was upon his guard, and grappling tight with his antagonist, a fearful struggle commenced between them. At the same moment Mr. Gibbs sprang upon Brown and held him down, meeting at first but little resistance, for the man's senses were completely buried in sleep. But, as the grasp of his assailant began to oppress his throat he too roused himself and struck the traveller a tremendous blow on the head as he started up, but without inducing Gibbs to let go his hold. Then seizing him by the waist he endeavoured with his great strength to dash his head against the side of the cavern ; but with active dexterity Gibbs contrived to avoid the blow, keeping fast to his throat, to use his own simile, like a bull-dog, while Brown raged and swore with every blasphemy that the vocabulary of crime could supply.

The contest, in the mean time, between Morton and Williams was more silent, and apparently less violent, but more deadly. They were better matched in all respects ; the gentleman was taller, as active, as much inured to exercise and danger ; but not so muscular as his opponent. He had his pistol cocked in his hand, too, but that only embarrassed him, for he was determined not to use it but in case of the last necessity, and



as he was presenting it at his head with a low threat to fire, a well-aimed blow knocked it out of his hand, and it went off as it struck the ground. They then grappled with each other more closely, and wrestling with all their power, each strove to throw the other, till Williams finding that he had to contend with one as powerful and as skilful as himself, relaxed his hold for a moment, and thrust his hand into the pocket of his jacket. It was for life or death; for he knew that the withdrawal of his hand from Morton's shoulder would give his antagonist one fearful advantage, but he saw the two men at the mouth of the cave, and beheld Miles set down the lantern to start forward. His only chance was in despatching his adversary at once; and the next instant a pistol was in his hand. Morton perceived it turned towards him, and put forth all his strength. Williams staggered, wavered, lost his balance; but still, with the pertinacity of the wolf, that bites even in dying, he strove to aim the weapon aright as he fell, still clinging to his enemy with his left hand. Miles beheld the whole, as he rushed on; and he grasped at the felon's wrist, turning it somewhat from its course; but at the same moment that Williams fell headlong, the pistol went off; and Morton cast himself upon him, holding his chest down with his knee.

“Are you hurt, sir—are you hurt?” cried the gamekeeper.

“ Never mind ! never mind ! ” answered Morton. “ Tie him ! tie him ! ” and at the same time he pressed heavily upon his antagonist’s chest.

With rapidity and skill Miles slipped a noose over Williams’s arms (while Morton held him down), drew it tight, and tied it fast. “ Now, help them there ! help them ! ” said the young gentleman, rising ; and as Miles sprang away to aid Gibbs and the coachman, who were both struggling with Brown, Morton drew a second pistol from his pocket, turned to the mouth of the cave, and sat down, keeping a wary eye upon Williams. The man stood for an instant with his eyes bent upon the ground, without turning even a glance to the strife which went on for a moment near, ere his comrade was finally overcome and tied ; but at length, with a slow step, he advanced towards Morton.

“ Stand back ! ” said the young gentleman, as he saw him approach, raising his pistol at the same time ; “ I have not strength to struggle with you now, so I must fire, however unwillingly, if you attempt to escape.”

“ I was only coming to say I am afraid you are hurt, sir,” answered Williams, in a mild tone ; “ I am sorry for it ; but my blood was up, and I could not help it.”

At the same moment Miles seized him by the collar, and dragged him back ; but Morton exclaimed, “ Do not ill-use him—do not ill-use him,

on any account!" and the other three gathering round the young gentleman, whose face had turned somewhat pale, saw the blood streaming rapidly over the breast of his shirt from the right side, as he leaned upon his left arm.

## CHAPTER XVII.

THE postchaise which contained Alfred Latimer and his poor bride rolled along as fast as two horses could draw it; but yet not fast enough for his impatience, for remorse and fear were upon him. He fancied that he had taken all his measures so well, indeed, that suspicion was not likely to fall upon him speedily, if at all. He fancied that it would be some time before the bloody clothes which he had left at Mallington House would be discovered; and as no one knew that they belonged to him, that it would be still longer before any circumstance would show that they had ever been in his possession. Even his marriage with Lucy, he thought, would tend more than all the rest to the concealment of his part in the crime that had been committed; and he argued and re-argued with himself to prove to his own satisfaction that he was quite safe. Yet fear was in his heart; for, with a very few exceptions, terror is always the follower of crime. He could not banish it; he could not drive it away. More than once he pulled

up the covering over the little window at the back of the chaise and looked out behind ; more than once he called to the postboy to " get on," though he was going as fast as he could.

Remorse, also, was doing its part bitterly and terribly ; and the struggling feelings within his bosom strangely affected his demeanour. Sometimes he would fall into deep and gloomy fits of thought ; sometimes he would answer Lucy sharply and angrily, sometimes be prodigal of tenderness and caresses. He loved her certainly better than he had ever loved any human being. He had always done so ; and now he clung to her as the only solace left, and the only fragment that he had saved out of the wreck of better things ; and yet the impatience and irritation of his mind would not suffer him to be wholly kind. But she bore all with gentleness and affection, as she had been lately taught to bear ; and she now saw that something, she knew not what, weighed heavily upon his mind. For a moment at one time she thought, with deep grief, that it might be his marriage with her that irritated him ; that he might regret it ; that he might feel that it had degraded him ; but then came one of those fits of tenderness which showed her that such could not be the case.

She little dreamed, poor girl ! that she was sitting side by side with the murderer of her father ; and that the hand, the burning hand, which clasped hers, was stained with her parent's blood !



Onward, however, they went, and had gone near fifty miles of their way before Harry Soames, the constable, set out from Mallington in pursuit of them. But though poor Lucy was tired, and Alfred Latimer himself became drowsy with the exertions and the watchfulness of the preceding night, still he went on, till towards eleven they reached the town of Southampton. As soon as the chaise drove up at the door of the inn, Alfred Latimer inquired when the packet would sail for Havre; and, to his great relief, heard that it got under weigh at four o'clock on the following morning. He immediately sent to secure berths for himself and his wife; and, after a light meal, bade Lucy retire to rest for an hour or two. But he himself did not lie down, fearful lest the people of the inn, notwithstanding all his injunctions, should not call him in time; and he remained dozing by the fire of the sitting-room in a half-delirious sleep. The horrors that he underwent during the three hours that he thus remained are indescribable. Scarcely had he closed his eyes for five minutes, when the figure of poor Edmonds, as he lay bleeding on the floor the moment after he had shot him, presented itself to his sight, and he woke with a start of agony. Then, when he slept again, he seemed to hear loud voices shouting, and people screaming out his name, and calling "Stop the murderer!" and again sleep was banished. Thus it went on all the time till, at the hour appointed, the punctual porter of the inn came

with a candle in his hand to call the gentleman and lady that were going by the packet.

Lucy was soon roused, and ready to depart. The trunks and boxes they had brought were put upon a wheelbarrow; the bills paid; the servants fee'd; and, with the daughter of his victim hanging on his arm, Alfred Latimer took his way down through the dark streets to the port.

It was a fine clear night, the wind was light and favourable, and no obstacle or impediment presented itself. The careless examination to which goods going abroad at that time were subjected at the Custom House was soon got over; one trunk was opened, and then all were marked with chalk, and carried to the vessel. Alfred Latimer and Lucy went on board at the same time, and both went down below to wait for the ship sailing.

In about twenty minutes after there was a good deal of noise and swearing upon deck, and Alfred Latimer looked anxiously towards the cabin-door; but presently a sort of swaying motion was felt, the ship began to bend considerably to one side, and the noise of rushing water showed him that they had got under weigh. It was a blessed relief, but still he could not rest; and as he and Lucy were the only cabin passengers, he laid down for a short time on the sofa by the side of her berth, and then started up again, saying he would go upon deck to see how they got on.

He found everything now calm and quiet, the ship going easily through the water, and the

different lights that marked the shoals and headlands in that part of the channel distinctly visible. He wished that they were all passed ; but still it was some satisfaction to be at sea, and he gazed over for a few minutes into the water as the ship sent it in foam from her sides. Presently, however, the captain gave some orders, the speed of the packet was slackened, and then apparently she stopped, without however letting down the anchor, and in reality driving on slowly with the tide.

“ What is the matter ? ” asked Alfred Latimer of one of the sailors, who came up the gangway with a coil of rope on his arm.

“ Nothing but a boat from Portsmouth, sir,” answered the man, unfastening the bolt where what is called the accommodation-ladder is placed.

Alfred Latimer asked no more questions, but instantly went below, and there remained listening with the cabin-door ajar in his hand. Presently the sound of oars, a grating noise against the ship’s side, and voices speaking, were heard. A good deal of hallooing followed, and then some conversation upon deck ; but the unhappy young man could not distinguish anything that was said. In another instant, however, steps were heard coming down, and he closed the door hastily, and laid down upon the sofa again.

The persons who had descended went into what was called the gentlemen’s cabin first ; but

then almost immediately returned, and the door of that in which Alfred Latimer and his poor wife were, was thrown unceremoniously open. The first who came in was the captain of the ship, but two other faces appeared behind him, and in one of them the wretched young man instantly recognised a countenance which he knew too well—that of Harry Soames, the constable of Mallington.

His fate was no longer doubtful; a chill like that of death spread over his whole frame, and though he shook not, nor uttered a word, it seemed as if all his limbs were changed into stone.

“Ah, Master Alfred!” cried the constable, in a familiar tone, “I’ve caught you at last, have I? ’T was devilish clever of you that doubling upon me at Andover, and taking to Southampton instead of Portsmouth, where young John Blackmore said you were a going. But you must come along now, and I am sorry to say I must put the darbies upon you, for you see the offence is a big ’un.”

Alfred Latimer stood before him without word or motion, with his eyes gazing upon him, his lips quivering, and his cheeks as pale as death.

“What is the matter?” cried Lucy, rising in terror. “What is all this, in Heaven’s name?”

“Why, it’s a bad job, Miss Lucy,” replied Harry Soames. “I must take your lover here—

that's to say your husband, for I hear you are married outright—away with me. I've got nothing to do with you. The warrant's against him, and you can go where you like—to France, if it suits you."

"I will go wherever he goes," answered Lucy, clinging to the arms of her husband.

"Can't allow that," said Mr. Soames, in a decided tone; "and, besides, you see it is impossible. I and the other constable have got to take him back, and the shay will but hold three anyhow. Howsoever, you can come after us if you like, though I'd advise you not."

"Where are you going to take him?" cried Lucy. "What are you putting those things on him for?" and she gazed with terror upon the handcuffs that they were fastening upon his unresisting arms.

"Why, we are going back to Mallington," answered Harry Soames, "and that as fast as we can go; and as for why we are putting these things on him, you see it's for murder"—he had very nearly added "of your own father," but he had once had a child, and he paused, thinking, "I will not say that."

"For murder!" exclaimed Lucy, "for murder! Well, he is my husband, and I will go with him, whatever he has done."

"But I tell you you can't, marm," answered Harry Soames. "It's no use argufying, it can't be done."



"Then I'll follow," said Lucy, mournfully—"I'll follow, wherever he goes."

"Come," said the captain of the vessel, "you had better get him out of the ship as fast as you can. I can't lay-to here all night. I thought there was something wrong about him when first I saw him. Come, take him away to the boat."

"Oh, take me with him—take me with him in the boat!" cried Lucy; "at least take me on shore with him!"

But Mr. Soames thought fit to assume a harshness which, notwithstanding his various faults, was not natural to him. "It's a great deal better she should be out of the way," he thought, "she'll only break her heart if she comes in the midst of it, and finds how it all is. Better the young dog should be safe lodged in the stone pitcher, and her father's burial over, before she gets home, anyhow;" and, therefore, upon these considerations he replied, "No, that can't be permitted, marm. You may just speak a word to him, if you like, before he goes. There can be no harm in that. Stay a minute, captain, there's a good soul. They are new-married people, and this is a hard parting," and he walked towards the door.

"And what am I to do with the girl?" asked the captain, in a low voice, following the constable.

"Oh! you must take her over to Havre, and bring her back again if she wants to come," an-

swered Harry Soames. "I'm not going to take her ashore, I can tell you, for many reasons; but be kind to her, there's a good man, for she comes of very good people, and he's a gentleman of high family, although he has played this here trick."

"Are they really married?" asked the captain.

"Ay, that they were, yesterday morning," answered Harry Soames; "I see the gentleman that married them."

In the mean time Lucy had cast her arms round her husband's neck, and given way to the tears she had long repressed. But Alfred Latimer recovered himself sufficiently to whisper, in a quick tone, "Put your hand in my waistcoat pocket, and take out the key of the large trunk—all the money is in it. Go on to Havre, and then come back again if you like, Lucy. But on no account bring that trunk back with you, or anything that it contains, but what money you want. Quick—quick!—don't let them see you."

Lucy did as he bade her; and the moment after Harry Soames said, "Come, I can't give any more time, Mr. Latimer; you must come along."

"Well, I am ready," answered the young man. "Farewell, Lucy!—farewell!"—and he kissed her tenderly.

They were obliged to take poor Lucy's arms from his neck before they could lead him to the deck. Alfred Latimer went calmly, though

slowly ; but, as he approached the ship's side, the overwhelming impression of the dreadful situation in which he was placed rushed upon his mind more forcibly than it had done before. The horror of being branded and tried as a murderer—the sight of all those he had known from his youth gazing upon him with horror, and the agony of a public execution—all seemed to flash upon his mind at once, and he thought anything would be preferable. He was near the ship's side—one of the men had him by the arm to help him down into the boat, and his hands were manacled ; but he contrived to dart away, and at one spring cleared the bulwark. A dull splash was heard in the water, and a loud shriek from Lucy, who had followed close behind ; but the instant after one of the boatmen exclaimed, “ I have got him—I have got him ! Here he is ! ” and as they held the lantern over the ship's side they saw two of the men below pulling the wretched culprit into the boat.

“ Oh ! let me go with him—in pity, in mercy, let me go with him ! ” cried poor Lucy ; but Harry Soames and his companion scrambled down the ship's side without heeding her, and the next moment the boat pushed off, leaving her upon the deck.

“ There, go down, go down, my poor young lady,” said the captain, in a kindly tone—“ go down and sleep. Perhaps they won't be able to prove anything against him after all.”

Those were the first words of comfort that Lucy had heard, and, after gazing for a minute in the direction that the boat took, she did go down into the cabin, but not to sleep. Still the captain's words returned to her mind.

"They may not be able to prove anything against him," she repeated to herself. "Oh! no—no—no, I am sure they cannot. Murder! Alfred would never commit murder! Perhaps he has killed somebody in a duel; they call that murder sometimes, but then they are always pardoned, and I am sure he will be."

She gave up her mind, however, to bitterer thoughts when she remembered many of the circumstances that had taken place—the companionship of Williams, the long absence of her husband for a day and two nights, the terrible agitation he had displayed, his haste and eagerness to reach a foreign country, and the sort of dull despair that had fallen upon him when Soames and his companion came on board. "I will return directly," she thought. "I will get back as fast as I can. But where shall I go when I reach Mallington? My father would be angry and not see me, and my mother will not venture to have me there. I will go to Dr. Western; he will be kind, though he may be angry, and he will pity me and help me, I am sure. But I must go back directly. I wonder if they could not land me somewhere as they go."

As soon as this thought struck her she looked

forth from the cabin and called the steward, inquiring whether the captain could not put her ashore on the Isle of Wight? The reply, however, was in the negative; and a few minutes after the captain himself came down, saying, "I sha'n't touch anywhere till I get to Havre, ma'am, but I can bring you back the day after to-morrow, if that will do. But I think you had a great deal better lie down, for we shall soon get into rough water."

"The day after to-morrow!" said Lucy. "That is a long time;" but the poor girl had no other resource. Steam-packets in those days did not span the seas as with a flying bridge, and Lucy, after brief deliberation, agreed to the captain's proposal to carry her back again. Then, lying down in her berth once more, she turned her face so that no one entering could see her, and gave way to her grief without restraint. Innumerable horrors could be added, if one so pleased, to the tale, of the sorrows which poor Lucy suffered, and the romance writers of an olden time would have produced a long history of disasters arising—as, indeed, was not improbable—from her having with her a number of things belonging to Alfred Latimer, and, more especially, a large quantity of the gold which had been plundered from Mallington House. She knew nothing of the fact, indeed; but still it was more than likely to have led her into difficulties and even dangers. But far from meeting with all the misfortunes



that she could meet with, various circumstances combined to prevent many of them from falling upon her. In the first place, Harry Soames, who had never before had the honour of capturing so respectable a prisoner for so capital an offence, what between the hurry and the eagerness of the pursuit, and the confusion and the novelty of boarding the packet at night, forgot those precautions which a more experienced officer would have taken with deliberate coolness, notwithstanding the haste and impatience of the captain; and, as his warrant was directed only against the person of Alfred Latimer, he satisfied himself with having obtained possession of that, and neglected to secure his goods, chattels, and effects, which, indeed, might have been of great consequence in proving the case against him. The captain, too, though a quick, sharp man, never troubled himself about the lady's trunks and boxes, and poor Lucy's utter unconsciousness of their importance, and the little heed she took of them, prevented anything like suspicion being aroused. Had they been seized she would have been left nearly penniless in a foreign land, either to die of want, or to find her way back how she could. But they were not seized, and everything was landed quietly on the quay at Havre. One box after another was taken to the Custom House; a few articles of English manufacture were detained as contraband, and all the rest were sent up to the

inn, whither she had gone by the captain's recommendation. At that inn we shall now leave her, unconscious of the danger she had run, but with her heart already loaded with fully as much grief as it could bear.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

GREAT was the bustle and confusion in Mallington, even at a late hour of the night on which the notorious Jack Williams and the little less notorious Tom Brown were secured. The inhabitants were sleeping their first sweet sleep; the Crumps and the Martins, the Dixons and the Skinners, were all in the arms of Morpheus; and dear Mrs. Pluckrose pressed the downy pillow, full of unconsciousness, when a loud knocking at the inn door startled her from her fond oblivion. Chamber-maids and ostlers were roused in haste, but the knocking continued till they made their appearance at the door; and then messengers were sent off with the utmost rapidity to the house of Mr. Nethersole and to that of Dr. Western. All these proceedings not only roused but agitated the inhabitants, and forth from many a window came many a head. The Misses Martin, in curl-papers, and Mrs. Dixon, in her night-cap, were amongst the first to thrust the ornament of their shoulders into the night air; but Mrs. Dixon

had the advantage, as the reader is well aware, of lying between the house of Mr. Nethersole and the inn; so that that excellent lady had the opportunity of calling to the ostler, as he hurried back from the former habitation; and inquiring, in dulcet accents, what was the matter with the Bagpipes.

“Why, ma’am,” replied the ostler, “it’s a sad business. Mr. Morton has just been brought in badly wounded; but they’ve got Jack Williams and Tom Brown as committed the murder, and that’s summut.”

After giving this account he pursued his way home again, although the Misses Martins screamed after him from the other side of the street, but screamed in vain. They had recourse to all the fictions of imagination to account for the bustle; they did some injury to the reputation of Betsy, the chambermaid, and even of good Mrs. Pluckrose herself; they went on with great vigour to calumniate every one in Mallington except themselves, and then fell sound asleep again, with the comfortable reflection that nobody could think worse of their neighbours than they did.

In the mean time, Mr. Morton was assisted up stairs, for by this time he was greatly weakened by loss of blood; and having undressed himself with difficulty, he stretched himself on the bed, to wait for Mr. Nethersole. But a very few minutes elapsed before that gentleman appeared,

half dressed indeed, but having a large case of instruments under his arm, and his assistant at his back. Without asking any questions, and with a very quiet, deferential manner, he proceeded to examine the young gentleman's wound, and probed it to the bottom.

"There's the ball," he said, "there's the ball. That's lucky, we shall easily get at it. I fear, sir, I must put you to a good deal of pain; but it must be extracted immediately, and then we shall easily take up the vessels that have been cut."

"I do not mind the pain," said Mr. Morton; "but you had better get me a glass of wine, for I feel faint."

Mr. Nethersole, as we have said, was a skilful man, very dexterous in the manipulation of his tools; and while Mr. Morton had been speaking he had continued apparently probing the wound with a curious-looking instrument, somewhat like a pair of curling-irons.

"Get a glass of wine, William," he said; and at the same moment Morton felt a sort of tug, by no means of a pleasant description, but it was followed by instant relief from a sort of burning sensation, which he had felt just between the right shoulder and the chest, somewhat below the clavicle.

"Here it is," said Mr. Nethersole, with a slight degree of triumph in his tone, although it was low and mild; and he held up before Morton's



eyes a pistol bullet, which he had drawn from the wound. "All safe, my dear sir," he continued, "no bones injured; and now we will attend to the hæmorrhage." Before ten minutes were over, the bleeding had ceased; and Morton felt himself comparatively comfortable when Dr. Western arrived, with terrible consternation in his face. Good Mrs. Pluckrose, who had been holding the light with Spartan fortitude, now hastened to relieve the mind of the worthy rector, exclaiming "It's all right now, sir; the bleeding is stopped, and the bullet's out. There it lies upon the table."

But Dr. Western, without examining the implement of evil, advanced to his young friend's bedside, and took his hand quietly in his. "Oh! it's nothing, my dear sir," said Morton; "the loss of blood made me somewhat faint, but that is all the mischief that has been done. I took the liberty of sending for you, because I knew that you were sitting up, and wished you to communicate the fact to Louisa in such a way as would not alarm her. But I dare say I shall be able to get out to-morrow."

Mr. Nethersole shook his head. "Perfect quiet, my dear sir," he said, "is absolutely necessary. For three days, at least, I shall not let you quit your bed. The wound certainly is not dangerous, but we never can tell the result of inflammation, and, as you are well aware, some inflammation must come on, even in order to

effect the healing process. At present I would forbid all conversation. It is my invariable rule. Upon quiet depends your recovery in ten days or a fortnight, or you remain ill for six weeks or two months. You may, therefore, take your choice. We surgeons don't object to a long case, you know; but still conscience, conscience makes us give the patient his option.

"Oh! the shorter time by all means," answered Morton; "and, therefore, I will merely speak a few words to Dr. Western, and bid him good-night."

Mr. Nethersole, taking the hint, retired to the other side of the room, wiped his instruments, washed his hands, and conversed a few moments with Mrs. Pluckrose, while Morton requested the clergyman to take every measure for securing the comfort of poor Mrs. Edmonds, and arranging the funeral of her husband after the coroner's inquest had taken place. Many were the messages, also, which he sent Louisa, beseeching her not to make herself uneasy, but Dr. Western well knew that it would be in vain to attempt to relieve Louisa's anxiety till she herself could see him.

Leaving Mr. Nethersole there, resolved to stay all night by his patient, the rector took his way homeward, and retired to rest, thinking he would spare Miss Charlton all knowledge of the events which had taken place as long as possible. But with the very best intentions, and with the very best judgment, we often produce greater pain to

those we love by the means we take to secure them from it. For, unless we could see the intricacies of the heart, we can never tell how to apply the balm to the exact spot where it is required. Louisa had not been deceived by the air of calmness and indifference with which her lover had set out that night. She saw that he was going upon some expedition of importance, and the very silence which had been maintained in regard to its end and object had naturally made her suspect that it was of a dangerous character. Sleepless and anxious, therefore, she had lain listening for every sound till the ringing of the bell, the knocking at the door, and the hurried going out of Dr. Western, showed her that some events had taken place, though of what nature she could not tell. Still she lay and listened, but did not hear his return, for he gained admission to the rectory by his own key, and made no noise in retiring to his room. With the earliest light of day Louisa was up; and in less than half an hour afterwards was down in Dr. Western's study. As always happens in such cases, the very tidings which he wished to communicate as gently as possible, were told by the housemaid in the most abrupt and exaggerated form. Louisa might, indeed, guess that something had been added to the tale over and above the truth, but still the fact was clear—Morton was wounded; and fear can be as great a magician as hope, although in a sadder way.

For a full hour Louisa continued giving way to all the darkest fancies that apprehension could call up; and then, unable to bear the suspense any longer, she hastened to the room of Mrs. Evelyn, and knocking at the door craved admission. The tale was soon told, and the old lady endeavoured to soothe her as much as possible, but as the best means of satisfying both, she went away, half-dressed as she was, to her brother's room.

Dr. Western did not make them wait, for he was already up and dressed; and, hurrying out, he informed Louisa, kindly and tenderly, but with perfect truth, of the state of the case.

"Morton is certainly hurt, my dear," he said, "but not dangerously. I assure you there is not the slightest cause for apprehension, and you know that I would not say so unless I had good grounds."

"I am perfectly certain of that," replied Louisa; "and your assurance is a great comfort to me; but yet I should be more happy if—do you think there would be any harm or impropriety in my going with you to see him?"

"No, my dear," answered Dr. Western; "circumstanced as you are, and with your guardian at your side, I think there would be none; but there is an objection of another kind. Mr. Nethersole recommends perfect quiet for the next three days. Now, I need not tell you, Louisa, that Morton could not see you without very different

emotions from those with which he would receive the surgeon, or the surgeon's assistant. Therefore, I think you had better forbear."

Louisa was reasonable. "Whatever I may feel," she said, "I will do nothing to protract his illness; but at all events, as I suppose you will go to see him yourself, I may accompany you to the door. That will be some satisfaction."

To this there was no objection; and it was arranged that about the middle of the day Louisa, Mrs. Evelyn, and the good doctor, should go together to the inn, and thence cross over to Mallington Park, on a visit of consolation to poor Mrs. Edmonds. Before they set out, a message from Mr. Nethersole brought the welcome intelligence that Morton was proceeding perfectly well, and that he wished to see Dr. Western, to which the surgeon assented; and when, after having waited in the carriage for about a quarter of an hour, while the clergyman visited the wounded man, Louisa was again joined by her guardian, she received the still better tidings, that her lover was apparently better than the night before; and Dr. Western added, with a smile, "The only danger is, that he seems so well, it will be difficult to keep him quiet."

They then drove over the bridge, and up the chief road towards the Hall; but just as they were turning off in the direction of poor Edmonds's cottage, they passed a number of men on foot conversing together, whom Louisa at once understood



to be the coroner's jury. She turned her head away with a slight shudder as the sight brought back to her remembrance all the dreadful details of the crime which had been perpetrated, and the consequences which were to flow from the acts which were then taking place. When she thought of Alfred Latimer; of one brought up in the same house, and nearly connected with herself; of his being brought to trial for so dark and dreadful a deed; of having to appear as a witness against him to aid in his condemnation, and to know that she had a share, however unwillingly, in working his destruction; when all these circumstances came across her mind, she almost feared that she should never have strength for the task. All seemed dark and gloomy around Louisa Charlton, except the one bright spot where love shone, like the sunshine that sometimes bursts through a stormy sky; and her heart was bitterly depressed when they reached the poor park-keeper's cottage, and a new scene of sorrow was presented to her.

Mrs. Evelyn and Louisa were left for nearly two hours with poor Mrs. Edmonds, while Dr. Western went up to the Hall to make the various arrangements that were necessary, and to learn the result of the coroner's inquest. On his return he stayed with the poor widow for some time, and thus it was four o'clock when the carriage again drove from the door. The beautiful scenery of the park as they passed through it—the soft lawns and

green turf—the brown wood sweeping round—the glistening river, caught here and there through the gaps in the trees—were all lighted up by the calm evening sunshine, and, by the aspect of the great Creator's works in a state of such tranquillity, seemed to offer a sad but monitory contrast in the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, to the troublous passions and bitter strifes of man, which had filled the hearts of all around with pain, anxiety, and fear. But one sight more was wanting to make that contrast more complete, and it was to be added before Louisa reached her temporary home. The carriage drove slowly over the bridge; and, at the spot where the roads crossed, was turning to the left towards the rectory, when, suddenly, dashing down the hill as fast as four horses could bring it, appeared a postchaise approaching the inn. Louisa's eyes were turned in that direction, when she naturally gazed at so unusual a sight in the little town of Mallington; but the first object she beheld in the vehicle was Alfred Latimer, seated between the constable, Harry Soames, and another man, to whom she was a stranger. The face of her step-mother's son, once florid and healthy, was now as pale as death; and there was something in the position in which he sat, in the straitened and forward posture of the arms, which showed her that his wrists were manacled. His eyes were bent down, so that, though seen, he did not see anything that was passing around; and Louisa drew back in the

carriage, and pressed her hand upon her brow. Dr. Western's chariot rolled on without pause; and the fearful sight of one who had called her sister brought past his own door as a captured felon was soon removed from her eyes.

## CHAPTER XIX.

JUST one week passed after the discovery of the murder at the Hall; and, at the usual hour in the evening, the London coach stopped at the inn in Mallington with a heavier load than it ordinarily brought. The burden, indeed, was not destined to swell even for a time the population of the little town; for only one passenger got out of the inside and gave any indication of an inclination to remain. That one was a lady, simply, though nicely dressed; and one box, or rather trunk, which contained her worldly goods, was taken from the boot by the coachman, and set down at the door of the Bagpipes. Mrs. Pluckrose was waiting, as she not uncommonly did, to see what fortune fate would send her by the coach, and, after eyeing the lady for a moment, for her features were not clearly discernible through a thick veil, she approached with a courtesy, asking if she intended to stay in Mallington.

“I will leave the trunk here, Mrs. Pluckrose,”

said a voice the good landlady knew right well ;  
“but I must go down to Dr. Western’s immediately.”

“Dear me, Miss Lucy!” exclaimed Mrs. Pluckrose. “Dear me! is that you? You have come at a sad time, Miss Lucy—Mrs. Latimer, I mean to say—I wish you had come at any other time.”

“I know it is a sad time,” answered Lucy, “I know it too well, Mrs. Pluckrose ; but, nevertheless, I must go down to Dr. Western’s directly.”

“Oh, don’t go there just now, ma’am!” rejoined the worthy landlady. “Don’t go there just now, my dear child,—or, at all events, stop a little here. Come into my parlour, there you can be quite quiet and private.”

“No, no!” answered Lucy Edmonds ; “I must not stop for anything. Only just take care of my trunk till I know where I can lie, Mrs. Pluckrose ; I am determined to do just what Dr. Western tells me ; and wherever he tells me I ought to go, there I will go.”

“Well, that’s right—that’s very right!” answered Mrs. Pluckrose ; “but yet, my dear, I wish you would wait here for a little.”

Before Lucy could answer, the coachman came up, with his bill in his hand, saying, “Four and twenty shillings, if you please, ma’am ;” and the landlady was called away to reckon with one of the travellers, who was about to proceed.

Lucy paid the money, received the admonition



to “remember the coachman” with due attention, and then crossing over the way, followed the road by the river bank towards the rectory. Her steps were wavering and uncertain—her eyes bent upon the ground, and, to tell the truth, they were filled with tears, for every painful memory of the past, and every dark anticipation of the future, rose up before her, as she proceeded through the scenes of her early days, with none to welcome her, with none to offer one kindly word, or greet the wanderer’s return with an embrace. From time to time she looked around, as if fearful that some one should see her whom she had formerly known. She dreaded to meet her father’s eyes, little dreaming that those eyes were covered with the shroud. Even the mother who had so loved her—who had always been so tender and so kind—she would fain have shunned, little knowing that that mother was standing by a husband’s grave on the road directly before.

When she had advanced about a quarter of a mile, she saw a lady and a gentleman coming slowly towards her, the latter very pale, and apparently languid and ill; the former with her eyes anxiously turned towards his countenance, and her hand resting very lightly on his arm. Lucy instantly recognised Miss Charlton and Mr. Morton, but she could not make up her mind to speak to them; and anxious to avoid their notice—though she might have passed safely under the thick veil which she wore—she crossed the little

bit of green sward which lay between the road and the river, and gazed upon the passing waters, as if some secret treasure lay hidden beneath their course.

When they had passed by, she resumed her walk, and was approaching the rectory, when she caught a sight of Dr. Western's figure coming by a private gate from the churchyard into his own grounds. But upon the open road, before the rectory, there was another sight—two undertakers, in black, were leading the way from the churchyard before a long string of other persons, with all the signs of deep mourning in their apparel and demeanour, who seemed to have been attending a funeral. Lucy hurried forward, in the hope of avoiding them, by the gates which led into the garden of the rectory; but just as she did so, her eye fell upon the form of a young boy, walking beside a woman, whose face was buried in her handkerchief. They were the two first of the sad procession, the principal mourners, and in the one Lucy recognised her brother. Who was the other? The poor girl eyed her with a sinking dread at her heart, which made her whole frame tremble. The woman withdrew her handkerchief for a moment from her streaming eyes to speak a word or two with the boy, and Lucy beheld her mother.

A part of the truth—happily, only a part—flashed instantly upon her mind. Her father was dead! She accused herself of killing him; and,

giving way to the sudden impulse of grief and love, she darted forward towards her mother; but ere she reached her, all the exhaustion that a week of agonizing suspense had produced, the weariness of travelling, the lassitude of long-endured grief, overpowered her corporeal energies; she felt an indescribable sick faintness spread over her whole frame, the objects swam before her eyes, her brain seemed to turn round, and she sank senseless at her mother's feet.

It needed not the sight of her face to show her mother who she was; and Mrs. Edmonds stooped tenderly over her while one of the men who had followed the body of the poor park-keeper to the tomb, lifted the unhappy girl in his arms. There was no look of reproach upon the widow's countenance—there was no reproachful feeling in her heart. She knew well that the grief and agony of her child, when she came to learn the whole, would be far more than sufficient punishment for any fault she had committed, although Mrs. Edmonds was not aware of how much there was to palliate Lucy's conduct, or that she was rather the victim than the offender. While she was thus hanging over her, with all a mother's feelings strong in her heart, and while Lucy's brother was rubbing her hand, and gazing at the same time at the wedding-ring upon her finger, the voice of Dr. Western (who had been drawn to the spot by the sudden halt of the funeral party, and the little bustle that succeeded) was heard from within the

garden-fence, desiring that Lucy might be brought into his house.

This was soon done; and under Mrs. Evelyn's kind management the poor girl was speedily restored to consciousness; but as soon as Dr. Western saw the returning colour appear in her cheek he took her mother into the adjoining room, and urged upon her the necessity of concealing from her daughter as long as possible, the awful facts of which she herself had become by this time aware. Mrs. Edmonds would willingly enough have yielded to the good rector's advice, but she started a difficulty which he had not foreseen, for she knew her daughter better than he did.

"I will do anything you tell me, sir," answered the widow, in her humble manner; "but I can't help thinking my poor girl is suffering worse than she would do if she knew the whole truth. She fancies, sir, that it has been her going away killed her father. I could see it in a minute; and if you will ask her you will find it so."

"Such may be the case, indeed," answered Dr. Western; "but we will ascertain the fact, and act accordingly. Let me speak with her first, Mrs. Edmonds;" and returning to the library, where Lucy still lay upon the sofa, though now much recovered, he sat down by her, while her mother held her hand and kissed it.

"You are all very kind to me," said poor Lucy, "much kinder than I have deserved; and yet, indeed, indeed, if you knew all, you would see I

am not so much to blame as you think. Oh, my poor father! if he could but have known"—and she burst into tears.

"Lucy, my dear child," said Dr. Western, "we have no cause to think that he believed you so much to blame as you suppose he did—at least after his first anger was over. Doubtless, he would have been easily brought to forgive you, especially when he heard of your marriage, had not this fatal accident deprived us of him."

"A fatal accident!" exclaimed Lucy; "then it was not my doing!—A fatal accident!"

"Yes, my dear child," replied the rector; "he met his death by violence, it would seem; but as yet we know not the full particulars."

"By violence!" cried Lucy, raising herself, deadly pale, and gazing in the clergyman's face. "By violence!—and my husband—Oh, Heaven! my husband!—violence!—murder!" and she fell back again, as if life had utterly departed.



## CHAPTER XX.

It is extraordinary how near we are in point of time to barbarism—how very lately we have emerged from a state which, in many particulars, was worse than that of the savage tribes that roamed the forests. 'Not three-quarters of a century have passed since scenes daily took place within this island which, if recorded by a modern writer, would not be believed by the great majority of his contemporaries ; and of all the curious histories that could be written, perhaps the most curious would be the history of prison discipline in this realm of England. It is no longer ago than the days of our fathers, that in all great prisons a system of inconceivable licence reigned within the walls of the gaol, and every excess and every vice that the corrupt heart of man can devise was not merely tolerated, but actually encouraged by those who conceived their only charge and only duty to be the safe custody of those accused of, or condemned for crimes. Though the judges on the bench might be pure and upright,

the magistracy were corrupt and profligate, the whole system of police vicious, and the men and women, awaiting the sentence of the law or its execution, were not only suffered to mingle together without restraint or supervision, but were supplied, as long as they had money to pay for it, with everything that could drown thought or stimulate the passions. We have long since gone into the opposite extreme. Brutal harshness and severe infliction are now the consequences of mere suspicion; and the English gaol is in many respects modelled upon the prisons of the Inquisition. The cause of both these extremes is the same—the absence of fixed principles in legislation and civil policy—a want which will always, according to the tone of the day, produce either laxity and corruption in practice, or severity and injustice springing from cold and unsubstantial theories. But between these two extremes there is a mean, but that mean is, unfortunately, what men never seek, and which is seldom arrived at in the natural course of events. Thus, at the period to which our tale refers, which was nearly midway between the present epoch of iniquitous severity and that former time of careless and demoralising laxity which I have mentioned, although some of the evils which had preceded had been done away, many still remained to be removed; and although we had not yet adopted all the harshness of the present times, a good many unnecessary inflictions

were sometimes endured by the prisoner. All was, in fact, irregular; and had any wise and good man, in that state of transition, stood forward to propose a reasonable system of prison discipline, it probably might have been adopted. We might then have seen some classification of prisoners before trial—a classification easily devised; and which would have been most beneficial in its results. We might have seen those persons accused before a magistrate for the first time kept apart from those who had been accused more than once; those who had been accused more than once of offences within the summary jurisdiction of the justice, separated from those who had been actually convicted. We might have seen those persons who had been convicted of minor offences by a magistrate, divided from those who had been convicted of graver crimes by a jury; and many another distinctions might have formed the limits of different classes, remembering always that accumulated causes for suspicion, vouched by the authentic records of different courts, must always naturally justify, to a certain extent, the pre-supposition of guilt, and greater strictness of confinement.

This is all very dull, dear reader; and though not unimportant, is, perhaps, not profitable. I will, therefore, go on with my tale from the point at which I set out in the beginning of this chapter, simply with the purpose of giving some notion of the state of the prison at Sturton, in

which Alfred Latimer, with his two companions in crime, Williams and Brown, were now confined. A good deal of laxity existed. The prisoners were allowed to purchase anything they liked, if the governor of the prison did not judge it dangerous. They were suffered to walk out in the yard, to converse together, to arrange any plans they might think fit, and to see any one who might come to visit them, favoured by a magistrate's order, or the governor's caprice. The three persons I have named, all charged with the same crime, and committed very nearly upon the same evidence, were, nevertheless, very differently dealt with. Alfred Latimer, undoubtedly the most criminal of the three, knew little of the rigours of imprisonment but the name. He was a young gentleman, and was treated in a very gentlemanly manner indeed. He had a comfortable room in the governor's own lodging, a well-furnished table, wine at will, books to read, paper to write, and occasionally a game at piquet with another favoured culprit committed to the same gaol. When he walked out in the yard, no clanking irons announced the felon; and had it not been for the downcast look and gloomy brow, the quivering lip and the abstracted air, one might have supposed him a visitor, brought by curiosity to examine the interior of the gaol.

Neither was Williams manacled, though the desperate resistance he had made when he was

taken, and the wound he had inflicted upon Mr. Morton, might have well justified such a precaution. But since his confinement he had shown himself perfectly calm, tranquil, and obedient. His resistance, in the first instance, he shrewdly explained away, saying, that, suddenly startled out of his sleep, after a long and fatiguing walk, he did not know what his captors wanted, and expressing great and apparently sincere regret that he had hurt the young gentleman, who, he added, had always been very civil to him. He frequently asked after his health, and seemed well pleased to hear that he was recovering rapidly, displaying a great wish to see him, and ask his pardon for having wounded him.

Tom Brown, on the contrary, never appeared without being accoutred with what he himself called the "darbies;" but, to say truth, he had given cause for severity, having knocked down and nearly murdered one of the turnkeys two days after his committal. He thought himself very ill-used, indeed, when, walking out in the yard, he found Williams left to the free use of his limbs; and a feeling of rancour was generated in his bosom by the distinction.

For several days after their committal, Alfred Latimer did not appear in the yard at the same time with themselves, and at first Williams concluded that he had effected his escape, expressing to Brown some satisfaction that such was the case. Brown gave no answer but by a savage laugh;



and, as secrets will find their way out even in a prison ; they soon found that their comrade in crime was within the same walls.

Williams accounted for his non-appearance by the supposition that he was purposely kept apart from them by the authorities of the prison which, as the management of unconvicted prisoners greatly depended on caprice, was not improbable. But the facts of the case were very different. Alfred Latimer, on his committal, had affected to desire no communication with the persons under the same charge with himself, and had requested, as a favour, to be allowed to walk in the yard at a different hour from that assigned to them. He said, and said truly, though not for the purpose of truth, that his acquaintance with Williams, and having suffered himself to be led into several wild adventures by that man, had been the cause of all the evil that had befallen him, and he added that he wished for no more of his society. But very speedily a change came over his views, after speaking in private with a shrewd solicitor who had been brought from London to prepare his defence. He then saw that the evidence of Maltby, which clearly established the fact of his having been in company with Williams and Brown, would require a combination of measures with them, and he thenceforward became as anxious to speak with them as he had before been desirous of disclaiming any connection with them at the

period when the offence took place. He so contrived it the next day that at the hour assigned for his own walk he was apparently busy in drawing up notes and memoranda for his lawyer ; and afterwards, at the hour when he knew that they would be in the yard, he pretended to be suffering from headache, and requested to be permitted to take some exercise. The governor informed him in reply, that the two men, Williams and Brown, were then out ; but Alfred Latimer affected a tone of indifference, answering, " Oh ! I don't care for meeting them—I am not afraid to meet anybody ;" and having obtained leave, he went forth.

There were several people in the yard, besides the turnkey who was watching them at the door ; and the young gentleman, on first entering, had to abide all the insults and annoyances which usually await a new prisoner on first mingling with his fellow-captives. As soon as he could free himself he crossed over direct towards Williams, who was pacing up and down the yard with Brown, as if keeping watch on the deck of a ship ; and, after a slight hesitation, he shook hands with him, and entered into conversation with him as they walked. They could pursue no topic long and uninterruptedly, for many of their fellow-prisoners either crossed them, or came up for the express purpose of teasing the new comer, but from time to time they spoke of the subject that was naturally uppermost in the thoughts of

each, though in low tones, and with anxious looks around.

“ I don’t think it will do, Mr. Latimer,” said Williams, in reply to some observation of the other; “ I think they have got us tight, whichever way we turn, unless they break down at the indictment. You see that cowardly blackguard Maltby has sworn that he saw us all together on the very night that we came over the river, just after the time when the thing was done. Then, there’s that unfortunate job of your bloody clothes being found, and a dozen other things will come out besides, if they haven’t come out already. No, there’s nothing for it,” he added, “ but to get out of this place, if we can. I’ve a scheme on hand, which would be easy enough done, if it weren’t for these irons on Brown; but we’ll talk about it to-morrow, for it will soon be shutting up time.”

Alfred Latimer returned to the room in which he was confined more gloomy than he had been since he had entered those walls.

I will not recapitulate all the dark images that fancy called up before him, but only say that there he sat for more than one hour, with the thought of a dreadful death before him. The chance of escape from the walls of the prison seemed so faint that it gave him no relief. He looked upon it merely as a thing to be justified by despair, and he gazed trembling on into the future, tasting all the bitter fruits of crime.

While he thus pondered and thought, the shades of night began to fall, and the faint light and the grey and gloomy sky, which he saw through the barred windows of the gaol, harmonised sadly with the sensations in his own bosom. Was there yet penitence?—was there yet the repentance which is not to be repented of? Alas, no! There was fear, despair, and bitterness of heart; but his character was not changed. Vanity, in some shape, is at the bottom of one-half the crime and three-quarters of the madness of the earth; and it is a bar to all repentance. Still, still, Alfred Latimer cast the blame on every one else but himself. He fancied he had been driven to crime, step by step, by others. Every one he knew—every one who had any share in his education, or any control over his conduct—came in for their part of the charge which he brought against the whole world but himself. One had not given him aid when it was needful—one had irritated him in youth till he had been driven to low companionship; another had been over indulgent; another had been too severe; and he hated them all with that intense and violent passion which had led him on from act to act in the dark and fearful course he had pursued. No, oh no! there was nothing like repentance in his spirit; but, let it be remarked, I have not said that there was no remorse, for that is a very different sensation. When he thought of the dreadful act he had committed—

when imagination brought up before his eyes the form of poor Edmonds, weltering in his gore, it seemed as if a scorching and a seething flame passed through his heart and brain—not withering, not consuming, but inflicting agony indescribable. As far as he could command his own mind, he shut out all such images. He resolved to think upon the future, to struggle with the past. But the fatal past—the dark, the certain, the irretrievable—the only thing fixed, permanent, unchanging, unchangeable—still held him in its adamant grasp; and, like a chained bird, when his mind had fluttered away for a short distance, and fancied itself free, it was still brought back to the stake, and found itself bound down to horrors that could never be cast off. At night, too, in darkness and solitude, when every sound was still, and every sight removed, and the spirit left alone to deal with the things within itself, the oppressive burden of the heart was felt in all its weight, and the grievous load of sin pressed down every hope, and extinguished every light. It seemed as if a gloomy curtain was drawn between him and all external things, leaving nought within that sad and solemn circle but himself and his fearful crime. The spirit of the dead, whom his hand had slain, rose up as if to reproach him for the past, and to tell him, with prophetic tongue, of the future—the future not of this world alone, but of another—the interminable future, with all its store of agony, to which the temporary suffer-



ing of the gibbet and the cord was but an idle nothing. He thought of standing face to face, before the throne of God, with him whom he had murdered. He thought of the comparison that must then be drawn between the life of the victim and that of the slayer. He thought of taking his place amongst those who had spilt men's blood from Cain down to the last murder, and of being driven before the face of the assembled universe into the place of endless punishment. He felt that the agony of hell had already begun; he felt, too, that it could never end, for something told him that remorse must be eternal—that the crime, and its memory and its woe, could never, never be swept away—that the worm that dieth not was within him, the flame that cannot be quenched in his heart. Yes, there was remorse; but still no repentance.

Such thoughts and feelings were crowding upon him fast on the evening of which we have been speaking, while the shades of night drew a dim veil over the sky, and the light within his room faded gradually away. He would have fain fled from them; he would have read or written, or done anything to escape; and he grew angry and furious that they had not brought him lights, as they usually did about that hour. At length, however, he heard the bolts undrawn, and the door unlocked, and the next instant the governor himself entered with the turnkey, who bore the candles.

“Your mother, sir,” said the officer, “is in my room, wishing to see you. I don’t know any reason why she should not; the magistrates have given me no directions. So if you like to see her, you can.”

To the governor’s surprise, and it must be added to his horror, Alfred Latimer’s first exclamation was, “Curse her! she has done me more mischief than any one else. I don’t want to see her. I should like to see my wife, indeed, but I don’t care about this woman.”

The governor was turning away in some disgust, and without reply; but then the hardened villain seemed to think better of it, and exclaimed, “Well, never mind, let her come in; she may as well see what a terrible state she has brought me to.” And in a minute or two after Mrs. Charlton entered, supported by the governor.

I will not pause upon the first part of the scene that ensued, for it was too horrible to be dwelt upon. Bitter, horrible, and impious invective, was all that the mother heard from the lips of her son; and strong as was the spirit of Mrs. Charlton herself, it was completely cowed under his wild and outrageous violence. She strove to pacify him; and, with her usual skill, she soon divined that the only means of doing so was by holding out hopes. That quieted him a little; and when she went on to speak of the means to be taken for his defence, he listened sullenly, and answered from time to time in few words and in a bitter tone. His mind

was led on, however, by several things she said, to think over some cunning scheme for evading the grasp of the law. Neither mother nor son for one instant took into consideration the truth or falsehood, the justice or the iniquity, the right or the wrong, of anything they proposed to say or do. To save him from an ignominious death by any means was all that they considered. Mrs. Charlton never inquired whether he was innocent or guilty; but, after several schemes had been rejected, she said, in a low tone, "Don't you think I could bribe some of the jury? Three or four thousand pounds would tempt any common man to do more than that."

"How the devil will you know who the jury are till the very day?" exclaimed Alfred Latimer. But then, a moment after, he said, "Stay, stay! I have thought of something. Perhaps you could bribe the fellow who draws up the indictment—the Clerk of the Arraignment, I believe, he is called—to put in a flaw, and that would be sure work. But it will take a great sum, depend upon it. You must not offer less than five or ten thousand pounds."

"But where am I to get it!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton. "If I were to sell all my jewels and plate, they would not produce more than four thousand."

"You must get it from Morton," said her son; „he will give treble that, I am sure, to marry Louisa."

“He won’t, he won’t!” cried Mrs. Charlton. “I tried that before all this happened. He is as proud and haughty as Lucifer, and will not enter into any bargain whatever. If he would not do it then, I am sure he will not now.”

“You must try;” replied Alfred Latimer, doggedly; “or see me hanged—that’s all. I don’t suppose you care much about that. Still, you won’t like to have it said that your son died on a gibbet, for that would not suit your own purpose. So you must try; and if you can’t get him to do it any other way, set Louisa to ask him. He will do it for her, if not for you, for I suppose you have quarrelled with him by this time.”

“Quarrelled with him!” exclaimed Mrs. Charlton. “I hate him, I abhor him. Oh! if I have to permit that saucy girl to marry this conceited, mercenary upstart it will break my heart—it is well nigh broken already.”

“No fear of that,” answered her worthy son, “it’s tough enough, or else you wouldn’t hesitate when your son’s life is at stake. I dare say you think that under your new name of Charlton it will never be known that the accused person is your son; but I’ll take care of that, for I’ll call you as a witness at the trial, and have the whole story in my last dying speech and confession, that you may have it hawked about under your windows for a penny—ha, ha, ha!” and he laughed bitterly.

“Do not, do not—for Heaven’s sake, do not, Alfred!” exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, wringing her hands; “you know I would do anything for you—I will do even this, let it cost what it may. The girl will surely never refuse me; but I will try him first. If I could but drive them,” she continued, in a lower tone, after pausing, and thinking for a moment—“if I could but drive them to a sudden marriage, without my consent, then the whole property would be mine.”

“That’s all nonsense,” answered Alfred Latimer, “there’s no time for such manœuvres. You talk as if you and I were to live for ever. Better take what you can get at once, and drive a bargain with Morton. He’s a very good fellow, in spite of all you may say, and gave me help once before, when you wouldn’t.”

“I could not, Alfred, I could not,” answered his mother. “You know very well I had not the means.”

“I know nothing of the kind,” said her son, harshly; “and all I now know is, that your son will be hanged if you don’t do as I tell you. So you can finish the work you have begun; if you like. And after having contrived to bring me here, you can go on, and take me to the gallows; but I shall say there, and tell everybody that it is all your doing.”

“My doing!” exclaimed Mrs. Charlton; “what had I to do with it?”



“Oh ! a great many things,” answered her son ; “ education and example, too. I know a good deal that there is no use talking about now ; but it shall come out, by-and-by, if my mind is not made easy. ”

He spoke in a threatening tone, and his mother was profoundly silent.

Now the reader is well aware that Mrs. Charlton was not usually embarrassed with any very fine feeling ; yet she might be, and, doubtless, was shocked at the cold heartlessness of her son. But there were other causes for the emotion that she felt, which was great. Let every one arm himself in the triple brass of selfishness, as strongly as he will—there will still be some vulnerable point by which the arrows even of a weak and inexperienced hand may reach some vital part, and render every precaution vain.

Now, Mrs. Charlton knew that in all her schemes there was a vulnerable point, and though, perhaps, selfishness might have so far predominated as to induce her to leave her dearly-beloved son to his fate rather than sacrifice her future prospects ; yet there was something in his words and in his tone that alarmed her, and made her resolve to submit to a great deal to save him. I do not mean to say that she had any inclination to see him hanged, though there are mothers on record who have indulged in such a desire. Far from it ; but, nevertheless, it may be doubted

whether maternal love and tenderness would at once have settled the question, if fear had not had something to do with it. After an instant she replied, however, "I do not know what you mean, Alfred, and I certainly do think you very ungrateful. But that does not matter; I will do all that you wish, all that I can, to deliver you. I will sacrifice even my just resentment, and condescend to see this man. I will even sue to an ungrateful girl who, forgetful of all the benefits I have conferred upon her youth, now turns upon one who has been more than a mother to her, I am sure; and if I fail there I will contrive, notwithstanding, to raise the money in some way to save my son, I will sell everything—I will even pledge my income, and live in penury, if he too will not show himself ungrateful."

"Ay, come now, that is something like!" answered Alfred Latimer; and, after some further conversation in regard to the means and the agent to be employed in this scheme for frustrating the ends of justice, the mother and her son parted apparently better friends than they had met. Alfred Latimer remained revolving a new plan which had occurred to his mind for making all doubly sure, and preparing such a defence as would meet all the evidence against him; but Mrs. Charlton, entering her carriage, rolled away towards Mallington with thoughts which would not have been very pleasing to him if he could

have seen into her heart. Self, self, was ever uppermost in her thoughts, whatever were the circumstances in which she was placed, and not even maternal affection could act pure and unmingled.

## CHAPTER XXI.

THE human mind has a marvellous and very pleasant power, as the reader knows, of adapting itself to circumstances. Were sorrows and misfortunes to retain the same intense effect even while they themselves endure, the corporeal frame, if not the mental powers themselves, would give way under the continual pressure; and did the memory of each grief remain unimpaired, the accumulation in any one man's short career would abridge life or destroy reason. Memory, however, is but a painter of the past; and though the canvass will in some cases retain the lines and hues much longer than in others, yet she always uses fading colours, which lose part of their brightness even while she is laying them on.

The gloom which had spread over the little party at the rectory, in consequence of the dark and terrible events which we have lately recorded, had passed in a degree away. Cheerfulness had to a certain extent returned; and the feelings of all were at that point, where amusement of any

quiet and tranquil kind is sought by the mind, to relieve it from the painful consciousness not only of the sad things gone, but of others that are to come. Gaiety, indeed, was yet far away, and with Louisa Charlton, perhaps, would never wholly return. That lightness of heart which finds beauty and rejoicing in everything—the bloom of life's fresh fruit—can never be long preserved; for though the knowledge of good may and must be the source of the purest happiness, the knowledge of evil, combined inseparably in the fatal apple, is death to the warm and happy confidence of innocence. Nevertheless, Louisa had shaken off the deeper depression, and would suffer her mind to dwell neither upon the gloomy and terrible events which had lately taken place, nor upon those which were soon to follow. They would come rushing upon imagination, indeed, from time to time, whether she would or not, and cast a dark but temporary shadow on all around. But still there was light beyond the cloud; and hope, having good ground to rest upon, waved her on into the sunshine of coming years, when the storm should have passed by.

The worthy rector had dined somewhat later than ordinary; and he and his sister, and their fair guest, were still sitting round the table, evidently waiting for some one who was expected, but who did not come. Louisa seemed somewhat uneasy, and her kind old friend jested with her on her apprehensions without a cause.



“ Well, perhaps it is foolish, and perhaps it is wrong,” answered Louisa, “ but I am afraid it is natural too, when we have seen such terrible and unexpected things take place, to lose, as it were, our confidence in the future, and never see a friend depart from us without asking ourselves, ‘ Shall we ever behold him again? Will he be safe, well, uninjured, where he is going?’ ”

“ Is not that something very like our losing our confidence in God?” asked Dr. Western, in a graver tone. “ If, my dear child, it is our duty to bear any griefs or adversities that He may send us with tranquil submission to his will, depend upon it that it is no less a duty to look forward to all his dealings towards us with trust and hope, in the full knowledge of his goodness and mercy. One of the best and most beautiful exemplifications of faith in ordinary life is, the serenity with which a good man waits for the future developments of God’s will. We have no right to anticipate one evil, except as a consequence of our own bad acts; and he who has a conscience clear of offence may well feel sure, that if adversity befall him, it will prove ultimately a benefit rather than an infliction.”

“ Well,” said Mrs. Evelyn, who perhaps did not take quite so high a view as her brother, and was anxious to cheer Louisa by more human means, “ there can be no danger to Mr. Morton in this case; and here I think he comes, to show that no evil has happened.”

The sound of wheels grating through the gravel was heard as she spoke; and in another minute Morton himself appeared. He was still pale, and somewhat languid from his wound, but his face was bright and cheerful. Louisa would fain, if she had given way to the feelings of her own heart, have run out to meet him when the chaise first drew up to the door. The customs of society, however, which bind in their strong bond many of the better impulses of the heart, prevented her from so doing; but could not prevent her from springing up with extended hand, to greet him as soon as he entered the room.

“Here is a fair lady who has been frightening herself about you, my young friend,” said the clergyman. “Indeed, you must take care to get no more wounds and bruises, or her courage will all go—and she had once a good deal.”

“There was no danger in this instance, at least,” replied Morton, “for I had a phalanx of jailers and turnkeys about me sufficient to have protected a monarch. My journey has been successful, too, my dear sir,” he continued, putting a small pocket-book into Dr. Western’s hands, and seating himself by Louisa.

While the worthy rector opened the pocket-book, took out one paper after another, put on his spectacles, and examined them carefully, Louisa Charlton inquired somewhat timidly, of Morton, whether he had seen Alfred Latimer.

“No,” he replied. “On asking for him, I

found that his mother was with him; and of course I could not break in upon their conference. But I will go and see him some other day, dearest girl, and offer him every means of defence; for it is but right that he should have the full opportunity of proving his innocence, if possible."

"They are all here, then," said Dr. Western abruptly, raising his head from the small scraps of paper he had been studying—"there is no link wanting?"

"The only one that was missing is there supplied," replied Morton, "so that every difficulty is removed."

"Well, then, you have no objection now," said the worthy rector, rising from his chair. "Sister, allow me to introduce you to a new acquaintance. Mrs. Evelyn, the Earl of Mallington—My lord, my sister, Mrs. Evelyn."

Morton took the old lady's hand, laughing at her brother's formal introduction, and saying, "You must forgive me for my concealment, my dear madam; but as long as there was any doubt whatever remaining of my being able to prove my title, I did not choose to assume a name that might be taken from me; and having, when I first came down here in search of different documents, judged it best to drop my final name of Wilmot, retaining only the two first, as Edmond Morton, I could not well resume the other without betraying the whole secret."

"And do you think you deceived me?" asked

Mrs. Evelyn, with a quiet smile. "I can assure you, my dear lord, I have been well aware of the fact for the last fortnight. From the time when you were declared the owner of Mallington Park, I settled the matter quite quietly in my own head that you were the heir of the peerage."

"Nay," answered Morton. "I might have been the owner of the Park, my dear lady, without being the heir of the peerage. But you have certainly concealed your knowledge very well, for I never imagined that you even suspected how the case stood."

"Oh! a woman can keep a secret notwithstanding all man's libels upon her," replied Mrs. Evelyn. "There is Louisa,—who sits smiling there as if it were a great relief to her to be freed from the burden—she has borne it most heroically, I can assure you, and never hinted it even to me, her oldest friend."

"From her I felt bound to have no concealments," answered Morton, "and never will. Though I won her as a simple gentleman, yet, when once won, she had a right to share all my thoughts."

Louisa gazed at him with dewy eyes, brilliant yet moist, like a landscape in the early morning. But before she could reply, Dr. Western's old servant opened the door, saying, "Mrs. Windsor, sir, wishes to speak with you."

The words were addressed to Morton; and Dr. Western added, "she has been here twice before

this afternoon, and seems burdened with her secret also, for she seemed very anxious indeed to bestow one upon you, asking particularly when you would return. You will find a fire in the library, and we shall be in the drawing-room, when you have done with the good lady."

"She mentioned once before she had something to tell me," answered Morton, going out. "Oh! come into this room, Mrs. Windsor," he continued, finding Mrs. Charlton's housekeeper in the passage.

Mrs. Windsor followed him into the library, and closed the door behind her, looking, as usual, perfectly prim and quiet, as if she had come about the most ordinary business in the world. "I remember you told me, when last I was at Mallington House," said Morton, leaning on the table, "that you had something to communicate to me. Is it upon the same subject you wish to speak with me to-day, or another, Mrs. Windsor?"

"The same, sir," replied Mrs. Windsor, in her usual quick, brief manner. "I heard you had been wounded, sir, and did not like to intrude; but now you are well again, and things must come to a conclusion, I thought it best to come down, because there is no reason why Miss Charlton,—who has always been good and kind to everybody—should be made a bit more unhappy than necessary."

"Certainly not, Mrs. Windsor," answered Morton. "But may I inquire what you allude



to, or why you think your young lady is likely to be made unhappy at all?"

"Why, sir," replied the housekeeper, "I know my mistress very well—I have known her for a great many years. One can't do that without seeing and understanding what she means just as well as she does herself. Now, with regard to you, sir, and Miss Louisa, I have understood everything from the beginning, though I don't think you did."

"Certainly not from the beginning," replied Morton; "but I very soon found that there was something to be discovered, Mrs. Windsor."

"Oh dear! yes, sir," answered the abigail, with one of her axioms, which were rarely without a certain portion of good sense. "It's a very easy thing to conceal a great deal, but a very difficult thing to conceal that we are concealing something. However, as Mrs. Charlton never thought that I saw anything but what she wished me to see, I saw a great deal, as you may suppose, and I very quickly made up my mind as to what was her game with you."

"And pray what might it be, Mrs. Windsor?" asked Morton, desirous that the good lady should develope her own views.

"Why, sir, she took it into her head when first you came down, that you were a painter," replied the housekeeper; "and she held to that opinion because she was fond of it—long after she should have known better. She thought, because you did

not bring down servants and horses, and a carriage of your own, that you must be a poor gentleman, at all events, who would be glad to marry a young lady with a good fortune, at any price. She had been laying it out in her head for a long time, I know, and you were just the sort of person that suited her, for you were introduced by Dr. Western, and had the sort of air with you that would give her a good excuse for letting you be always with Miss Charlton, without pledging her to anything in case you did not come up to her price. So you were quite a godsend in her way."

Morton smiled to find how accurately Mrs. Windsor had calculated all her mistress's steps, and he inquired, "What might be the original cause of all this, Mrs. Windsor?—for taking it for granted that your view is quite correct, it seems to me that she has somewhat hurried all her proceedings."

"Aye, sir, that's because she's hard pressed just now," replied Mrs. Windsor. "She owes a great deal in different quarters, and people are getting impatient. She intended, some months ago, to have gone to London, and played the same game there, but there was a difficulty about money then, and you came down just at the time, and saved her the trouble. So she did everything in her power to promote matters, and when she found out that it all went on as she wished, she was quite delighted. She

got in a little fright, indeed, when she found out that you had more money than she fancied. But as she had sat down to the game, there was nothing for it but to play it out—which she did, I suppose, the last time you saw her?”

Morton was not satisfied with such vague explanations, and determining to bring Mrs. Windsor to the point, he said: “Why, what do you suppose she did, my good lady?”

“I suppose, sir,” said Mrs. Windsor, with a smile at the question, as if it were quite superfluous to put it, “that she told you she would be very happy to see you Miss Charlton’s husband provided you gave up one half of her fortune; that if you didn’t she would not give her consent; and if you married without it, it would all come to herself. I am sure that was her plan, whether she put it in execution or not.”

Morton meditated, but the subject of his reverie was not exactly what the reader may suppose. He was considering with himself the exact topography of Mallington House, and calling to mind the relative positions of the drawing-room, the library, the dining-room, and the hall, with a view to ascertain whether Mrs. Windsor could have overheard what passed between him and Mrs. Charlton. He settled it at length, however, that such a thing was impossible. “You are not very far wrong, Mrs. Windsor,” he said. “But before we speak farther on these rather delicate subjects, it will

be as well for you to tell me what the intelligence you have to give me is, and how it bears upon these matters."

"Certainly, sir," replied Mrs. Windsor, "I am sure I ought to beg pardon for speaking upon them at all. But you see, I came into the house when Miss Charlton was very young, and I have seen her grow up as nice a young lady as any in the world, and I cannot bear that she should be wronged. All I have therefore to say, is, that Mrs. Charlton has no more to do with Miss Louisa's marriage than I have, whatever she may say."

"But," said Morton, "there is a codicil to Mr. Charlton's will, by which it is provided that if Louisa marries without her step-mother's consent, the whole property falls absolutely to Mrs. Charlton."

"Pooh ! sir," exclaimed Mrs. Windsor, "that codicil is not worth a piece of packing paper."

Morton smiled at the boldness with which she spoke, though far from being convinced that she was right in her assertions. "Women, I am afraid, my good lady, are not the best judges of the law. The codicil is all written in Mr. Charlton's own hand, signed with his name, and though not witnessed, is as good as any other part of the will. However, set your mind at ease about your young lady ; it luckily happens that I am not so poor as Mrs. Charlton supposed ; and to one thing I have perfectly made up my mind—not to

drive any bargain whatsoever as to her fortune. She shall have all or none. Her hand is too precious a thing to be bought or sold."

"I was quite sure you would think so, sir," replied the housekeeper, "otherwise I should not have said a word. But with regard to the will—I am certain you are mistaken; and as I fancy things standing as they do, Mrs. Charlton will not be long before she begins the matter with you again, I think you might as well ask her one or two questions, and see what she answers. First, sir, I would ask," replied the housekeeper, "whether she was in the library for an hour and a half, when every body else was in bed, on the night that Mr. Charlton died? and whether she didn't write a great number of papers there, and burn several of them that were not quite done to her mind? Then, I would have you ask her where Mr. Charlton was on the 25th of July, 18—?"

"Why, that was the day that the codicil was signed," rejoined Morton, with the light beginning to glimmer in upon him.

"That is the day it is dated," answered Mrs. Windsor. "But what I want to know is, where he was on that day, for it is dated Mallington too, I think, and there must be a mistake somewhere."

Morton gazed at her steadily for a moment; but the woman's face was all calm and quiet, adding nothing whatever to her words. "I think, Mrs. Windsor," he said at length, "I had better call in Dr. Western to hear our consultation, as



he is one of Louisa's guardians, and an executor under the will."

"I don't know, sir," replied Mrs. Windsor, in the same quiet but quick tone. "You are the best judge; but perhaps, till you have considered the matter, it would be as well to keep it between you and I, and Miss Charlton. Dr. Western is a magistrate you know, and may think himself bound to take strong measures; which, when once they are begun, must be gone on with. I don't wish to do my mistress any harm; and I think if you were to talk quietly with her, and just ask her the questions I have told you, all would go right. It would be a sad thing, sir, to have mother and son in jail both at once; especially for Miss Louisa, when it is her own father's wife that she has to do with."

"You are right, Mrs. Windsor, and I thank you," answered Morton. "It will, indeed, be as well to say no more upon the subject than is absolutely necessary. Is there anybody else besides yourself who knows any of the facts?"

"A fellow-servant, sir," answered Mrs. Windsor, "knows that my mistress was in the library a long time that night, and that she burnt several papers; but no one ever thought of the date of the codicil, as it is called, but myself. Whenever it was read I thought, 'Why, master and mistress were both away at that time, or I am much mistaken;' and when I went and looked at my books I found it was just so. They went away four

days before, and did not come back till the week after."

Morton mused. The first question he put to himself was, " Might it not be better to do anything this unhappy woman demands, rather than expose so disgraceful an affair?" But the moment after he replied to himself, " No; I see not why she should be suffered to triumph in her knavery. If she escapes prosecution, she is perhaps too leniently treated."—" Well, Mrs. Windsor," he continued aloud, " I am very much obliged to you for the information you have given me. I will soon bring the question to issue with Mrs. Charlton, even if she does not do so herself; and, should need be, I will send for you to speak with me farther. At all events your services shall not be forgotten, you may depend upon it."

" I thank you very much, sir," replied Mrs. Windsor, with a low courtesy, " but I wish for nothing but to see right done; and I am quite sure that neither you nor Miss Charlton will see me suffer for speaking the truth." And thus saying, she courtesied again, and quitted the room.

## CHAPTER XXII.

WHEN Morton entered the drawing-room, after his conference with Mrs. Windsor, he found Dr. Western with a note in his hand, which the rector handed to him without comment. Morton took it, and instantly recognised Mrs. Charlton's handwriting. The contents of the present epistle, however, were of a very different character from any note of hers he had yet seen; and as he read, a smile came over his countenance, the internal causes of which I will leave the reader to divine, when he sees the substance of the lady's note, which was as follows:—

“ MY DEAR SIR,

“ I must really remonstrate upon the conduct which Miss Charlton pursues, and is suffered to pursue. You must be well aware that I have no false or affected prudery about me; and I trust that though my own conduct has always been governed by propriety, I have ever shown full consideration for the foolishness of young people. I learn, however, that Louisa, since you thought

fit, as her guardian, to remove her from my house, has been permitted to walk about the whole neighbourhood with Mr. Morton, alone; when that gentleman has not even yet obtained my consent to his engagement—as I suppose it must be called—to Miss Charlton; whom you must know I have always looked upon and treated as if she were my own daughter. I should have thought that gentleman's own good sense and good feeling—of which he is by no means destitute—would have shown him the impropriety of such conduct. But I cannot sit by and neglect my duty, by suffering it to proceed any longer without some explanation between himself and me. If, therefore, he is now at your house,—where I understand he is usually to be found,—I beg you will communicate to him what I say, and hint that it will be expedient that we should have some conversation without delay.

“Believe me to be, my dear sir, yours, &c.”

Such was the well concocted epistle which met Morton's eyes; and returning it to Dr. Western, still smiling, he said. “Well, my dear sir, what do you think of it?”

“Very bad, very bad,” said Dr. Western, shaking his head “You must act as you think fit, my young friend.”

“Perhaps the best way will be to see the lady at once,” observed Morton, after some consideration; “for though I must speak with Louisa fully

upon the subject, before I can finally determine upon anything, it may be as well to hear what Mrs. Charlton can say, in the first place."

"I will abide by anything you determine," replied Louisa, "for I am sure, Morton, you will remember that she was my father's wife, and will not do anything that is unkind."

"Undoubtedly I will not, Louisa," answered Morton. "But yet, my love, you do not know the whole. I wish much that my good friend Quatterly was down here still, for I want a little of his legal help in judging of these matters. I am afraid there is a certain perversity in my nature which induces me to resist desperately one part of the fate of all human beings."

"What part is that, Morton?" asked Louisa.

"Being cheated, dear girl," answered Morton, laughing. "But now I will run away, lest I be tempted to use any more of such hard words."

Taking his hat, Morton walked slowly up the hill to Mallington House. He had twice to ring at the bell before he was admitted; and there was something in the whole appearance and state of the house, a negligence in the air of the servants, and a number of little circumstances very nearly indescribable, which showed Morton that a great change had taken place since Louisa had left her own dwelling, and that the respect as well as affection of the inferior persons it contained, was gone from those above them. The butler, who opened the door, replied in answer to



his questions, that Mrs. Charlton was at home, and disengaged; and Morton, as he followed the man, said, deliberately, "Have the goodness to tell her that the Earl of Mallington wishes to see her." The butler instantly put on a deferential air, and while Morton remained for a moment or two without, he could hear his name announced, and Mrs. Charlton exclaim in a sharp tone, "The Earl of Mallington! What Earl of Mallington?"

"Mr. Morton as was, ma'am, if you please," answered the butler.

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Charlton, with a dry and somewhat sneering prolongation of the sound; "show his lordship in."

Morton was accordingly introduced; and the fair lady, rising, made him a profound and too ceremonious courtesy, saying, "I am informed that I have the honour of seeing the Earl of Mallington—pray, be seated, my lord."

"The same, my dear madam," replied Morton, calmly; for he easily understood that it was not particularly agreeable for Mrs. Charlton, to find his rank and station such as would afford no reasonable ground of objection to his marriage with Louisa. As she remained silent, however, he continued, "My friend, Dr. Western, informs me, that you wished for some conversation with me, and I thought it better to come up at once, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour."

"And thinking, perhaps," added Mrs. Charlton, who had rapidly arranged her plan, "that the

Earl of Mallington might find my views different from those expressed to Mr. Morton. In that, my lord, at least, you are mistaken; for, taking it for granted that your present rank is not, like your former name, assumed, that fact will only strengthen the opinions I before expressed."

"Let me correct one error," said Morton, as she paused for an instant; "neither my present rank nor my former name was assumed, my dear madam. My name is simply Edmund Morton Wilmot, or Wilmot Morton; and, as I never assume anything that is not clearly my own, I did not take the title of Earl of Mallington, so long as any one could entertain a doubt of my right to it. As all doubts and difficulties, however, are now removed, I should be deceiving you were I to give myself any other name."

"I am glad to find, sir, that you did not deceive me before," replied Mrs. Charlton, somewhat sharply; "and I only wish you had carried your candour farther, and informed me of your pretensions, as I should certainly, under those circumstances, have neglected the honour of your acquaintance. I have, I may almost say, an insuperable objection to young women of an inferior rank marrying persons of family. I have myself experienced all the evils which result from such unequal connections, and am most indisposed to sanction them in any case."

"I am very sorry to hear it," replied Morton; "but I fear, my dear madam, there is no help for

it in this instance, as I have no power to give up my rank, and no inclination to give up Louisa."

"You speak with prodigious coolness, my lord," answered Mrs. Charlton, with her eyes gleaming; "and I doubt not in the least that your fortune is so enormous as to make six or seven thousand a year with your wife a matter of no consequence to you at all. But one thing I must say, that Miss Charlton's guardians will not do their duty, unless they see, when such a sacrifice is made, that a settlement quite equal to the loss is secured to their ward."

"That will all be easily arranged," answered Morton, in a tone of the most provoking indifference. "I have the consent of both her guardians, which is, I believe, all that is necessary."

"To her marriage with you, sir, perhaps it is," answered Mrs. Charlton; "but to your obtaining a penny of her fortune something more is required—my consent. You take her a beggar, if you take her at all without my approbation; pray remember that."

Morton was provoked more than he had fancied his contempt would suffer him to be. "If what you say, my dear madam, is true," he replied, "I think, taking the whole matter in a mercantile point of view, you would be very foolish to give your consent at all. You seem to forget that it would be a great loss to you; and I cannot conceive how a lady of such correct calculations can even consider the matter at all—unless, indeed,

you entertain the opinion, which some people have, that the grounds of your pretensions are not quite so sure as they seem at first sight."

"Not sure!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, vehemently. "What says her father's will? You have seen it, doubtless, sir. It is proved—registered—acted upon. How will you get over that, I should like to know?"

"There are two or three ways in which I might answer that question," replied Morton. "In the first place, my dear madam, a Court of Chancery gives the means of putting a right and lawful construction upon wills; and it would be for that court to consider whether the refusal of consent, which would entitle you to the whole of Mr. Charlton's property, must not absolutely be made upon reasonable grounds."

"There is nothing to that effect in the codicil," exclaimed Mrs. Charlton. "The word is simply—consent."

"True," replied Morton; "but the codicil premises that it is made on the consideration that heiresses are too often the dupes of sharpers, and that the power given to you is to prevent that result in this instance. Such being the case, and I not being a sharper, the construction of the will may perhaps afford a curious and intricate question to the bar."

Mrs. Charlton remained silent, and very pale, for a minute or two; but at length she answered, "I see, my lord, that you wish to frighten me

with the idea of a long law-suit ; but I am not easily frightened."

" I should think not," replied Morton ; " and, therefore, what I am going to say will probably produce no alarm. The law proceedings, Mrs. Charlton, may perhaps be reduced within a very narrow compass ; for there are other questions, connected with this will, which may be much more easily decided than its construction. The first will be—is the codicil genuine?"

" Genuine!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, grasping the arm of the sofa—" genuine!"

" Yes," my dear madam, " genuine!" replied Morton. " There are two minor questions affecting that greater one, which it will be well for you to consider before you proceed farther in the course you have thought fit to adopt. The first question is, ' Whether, on the night after Mr. Charlton's death, and in the possession of all his keys, you did or did not pass a considerable time, when the whole household were in bed, in examining different papers, and writing others, in the library?' The next question will be, ' Whether the codicil to Mr. Charlton's will is not dated Mallington, on a day when Mr. Charlton himself was many miles distant from the spot?' I would recommend these subjects to your attention ; and, until you have considered them, I think we had better delay any farther conversation ; for there are acts which place people in very great danger, and which none of those connected with them can wish to be inspected too closely."



Thus saying, Morton rose, and walked towards the door. She sat, however, on the sofa, still and silent as a statue, with her horrified eyes fixed upon the table, and the agony of detected guilt at her heart. Notwithstanding the contempt he felt for her, Morton was moved with compassion when he beheld the intense sufferings which his words produced; and, after pausing for an instant at the door, he turned back, and, approaching close to Louisa's step-mother, he said, "Mrs. Charlton, listen to me for a moment."

She remained perfectly silent and motionless, however, as if she were deprived of all thought and sensation. "Listen to me, I beg of you," he continued. "Louisa and myself are disposed to do anything that is kind towards you. We cannot recognise a claim that we do not believe rightly exists; and, therefore, anything you desire must not be put in such a shape. We have no inclination to stir this question of the will, unless it be forced upon us; and farther, allow me to say, that, out of affection for her, I am ready now, or at any time, to do all I can to assist or befriend her father's widow. Pray think of this, and let me hear from you."

A ray of consciousness came into Mrs. Charlton's eyes, and she held out her hand to him. Morton took it for a moment, then released it, and left the room.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

THERE are times and seasons when intense corporeal suffering is a relief; for mental agony is far more terrible to bear; and it fortunately happens, in the strange, mysterious union between soul and body, that in general the powers of the human frame give way when the pangs of the spirit reach a certain point, affording either a diversion or a cessation of thought. At her mother's earnest request, Lucy Edmonds was conveyed to the park-keeper's house at Mallington Park, under a strict promise on the widow's part, not to say a word that would give her any certainty upon the terrible subject of her suspicions. Caution, however, was not very long necessary; for though Lucy was kept perfectly tranquil, yet before nightfall she began to show symptoms of fever. Her thoughts wandered, her cheek grew flushed, her breathing quick, and about midnight delirium came on, in which she seemed to lose all consciousness of her actual situation. Sometimes indeed, she would rave of

Alfred Latimer, but then it was as connected with the past—not with the present. For nine days this state continued; and then, carefully and tenderly nursed, youth and a good constitution began to triumph over disease and grief. The delirium ceased, she became quiet and more at ease, but it would seem that, for a time, memory of more recent events was altogether obliterated. She spoke little, and only uttered a word or two at a time, but those words showed that she had forgotten her marriage, and all the terrible events connected with it—her husband's situation; her father's fate; her hopeless journey with Alfred Latimer, and her own sad return to the scenes of her youth. There was a blank in memory, a cloud over a part of the past. Dr. Western visited her often, watching with the most kindly care every change that took place, anxious to seize the right moment for administering the only sort of consolation she could receive. One day it seemed to him that the time was fast approaching, for Lucy was much better. She was up; she could hold a conversation; she listened with attention, and apparently with deep thought to all he said; and he ventured to dilate in general terms upon the duty and necessity of submitting patiently to the will of God under all afflictions. He made no personal application of his words, and left her, as he thought, calmer and better prepared. But when he was gone, Lucy fell into a fit of deep meditation, and then

gave way to bitter tears. Her mother, who slept beside her, perceived that she wept through a great part of the night, and though her health did not suffer, as might have been expected; though she rose the next day, and dressed herself with apparently greater strength than she had yet displayed since her illness; though she took food and everything that was recommended to her, yet a deep gloom hung upon her, and in the evening she spoke with her mother for the first time, of her husband and of her father.

Mrs. Edmonds endeavoured to turn the conversation; but Lucy—though, from the agitation she perceived in her mother, she would not press the subject of her father's death—could not be brought to refrain from asking farther questions in regard to Alfred Latimer.

“Where is he, my dear mother?” she said. “Do not be afraid to tell me, for I now recollect all. They took him away from me—they put him in prison, I know. You must tell me where he is confined, for I must write to him—when I am able.”

The widow, seeing that she would not be satisfied without information, thought it best to tell her the truth, that her husband was in Sturton jail. But about ten on the following morning she set out to inform Dr. Western of what had occurred, leaving her son to sit with Lucy during her absence. When she went the poor girl was up and dressed, and apparently

trying to amuse herself by reading; but as soon as Mrs. Edmonds had quitted the cottage, she called her brother to her, saying, "John, I want you to tell me one thing, and then I won't ask you any more—Who killed our father?"

Her voice was perfectly calm, though low; and her manner displayed little or no agitation. But the boy, who had been warned beforehand, replied, with glistening eyes, "Indeed I don't know, Lucy. People say that tall man, Brown; or the other, Jack Williams; but nobody can tell rightly yet."

Lucy was silent, and looked at the book again, but her eye did not move along the line; and had the boy been very watchful, he must have seen that her thoughts were busy with objects beyond her sight. About five minutes afterwards his sister looked up, and said: "I wish you would run up to the Hall, John, and ask Mrs. Chalke to lend me the great book full of pictures that she once showed me. Bring it down carefully, there's a good boy."

Perhaps her brother might have hesitated to obey before his mother returned, if it had not been for the thought of the pictures in the book, which he was well inclined to look at himself. He paused an instant, indeed, but Lucy repeated her request, and taking his hat he set off as fast as he could for the Hall.

As soon as he was gone, his sister rose suddenly, went into the other room for her bonnet



and shawl, and having found them, hastened to the door and looked out—then darting away with a quick step, she made a circuit round the house, gained the shelter of the wood, and hurried along one of the paths which led along towards the stile near Dame Hazlewood's cottage. As she approached, however, she heard voices in the road, and turned away to the left to another stile further up the hill, and then issued from the park, and bent her steps on the high road to Sturton. She walked on for some way with much greater strength than might have been expected—but when she had gone about half the distance, however, her strength failed her and she sat down to rest for some time by the wayside. In about twenty minutes she rose again, and with tottering steps, hurried on till she came opposite to a little public-house, on the other side of the road, where she paused and looked up with a hesitating and uncertain air. But she felt that she could not proceed farther on foot without refreshment, and knowing the people to be good and honest country folks, well acquainted with her family she crossed over and went in. At first the landlord and his wife did not recollect her, for she was much changed, both in dress and in appearance—but when they did call her person to mind, they showed her such kindness as their somewhat unpolished nature permitted, and seeming to divine whither she was going, set before her some refreshments without asking any ques-

tions. The good man and his wife talked together, indeed, for some time, in a low voice; and Lucy, terrified lest any one should stop her, remarked, that their eyes were directed towards her as they spoke, and rose sooner than she would otherwise have done, to depart, asking what she had to pay.

"You are not fit to go, my dear," said the landlord, coming forward to her. "I suppose you are walking to Sturton—but it's a long way for a poor sick girl like you on foot. I wonder your mother let you come, and alone too!"

"I must see my husband, you know," answered Lucy, judging from the man's words that her whole history was known.

"Well, I don't say but you must," replied the landlord, "I suppose that's but right, whatever may have happened. But I'll tell you what, my dear, you had better have our chaise-cart. Bill will soon drive you over."

It may easily be conceived that this offer was a great relief to the poor girl's mind. The little tax-cart was soon brought out, and in about three quarters of an hour poor Lucy was at the gates of Sturton gaol. Her heart sunk when she approached them, and gazed up at the awful and gloomy masses of stone, which seemed to harmonize but too sadly and darkly with all the crime and sorrow which from time to time they contained. She rang the bell, however, and on the wicket being opened, asked to see her husband, Mr. Latimer. The man gazed at her with

a cold look, but a piece of money slipped into his hand soon softened him; and bidding her wait a minute in the lodge, while he asked the governor, he hurried away, leaving Lucy with one of the turnkeys, who was smoking a pipe at the table. Both remained silent, and the porter returned in a minute or two with the tidings that the governor had no objection. With eyes bent down, and wavering steps, and a heart beating wildly at every door they passed, poor Lucy followed the jailor along the passages of the prison to the room where her husband was confined. By the time the two large bolts were drawn back, and the door unlocked, she could hardly stand, but the moment after, the sight of Alfred sitting at the table, revived her, and running forward, while the jailor, said, "Here's your lady, sir, come to see you," she cast her arms round his neck and wept.

Alfred Latimer's eye was haggard, and his whole look anxious and despairing, but nevertheless he was truly rejoiced to see poor Lucy again. In the moment of his affliction and his danger, her coming was a true consolation and comfort to him, reviving for the time the faint light of better feelings in his dark and obdurate heart. He pressed her warmly to his breast; he soothed, he caressed her, and even so far forgot himself, as to remark her altered appearance, and say, "You look very ill, love. You must have suffered a great deal, I am sure, my poor Lucy!"

"I have been very ill," answered Lucy. "They thought me dying, I believe, for I quite lost my senses after I came back ; and they would not have let me come now, I am sure, if they had known it."

"They have no right to stop you," exclaimed Alfred Latimer sharply ; "are not you my wife ? They can't stop a wife coming to see her husband !"

"No ; it was because I have been so ill, and am so weak," replied the poor girl. "I feel as if I should faint now."

"Here, take some wine," said Alfred Latimer, placing her in a chair, and reaching a bottle from the mantel-piece. You must keep up, Lucy, for I may want you to help me—I am sure you will, Lucy, won't you ?"

"Oh yes, that I will !" answered Lucy. "I will help you whatever be the case, Alfred, for that is my duty now—yet, I would fain ask you one question, Alfred," she continued, in a sad and hesitating tone, "only one question."

A dark and fiend-like scowl came upon his face, and he replied, "Ask me no questions at all, for I shall answer none—that's to say at present—for small words often do great mischief. Your only business is, if you really love me, to do the best you can to get me out of this scrape."

Lucy was silent for a moment, with her eyes bent down in bitter thought ; but looking up the instant after, she said gravely, "I will do all I can."

“That’s a dear girl,” answered her husband, “and I’ll tell you what you must do. In the first place, you must know nothing about this business at all; and if any one asks you, say so.”

“I do know nothing,” answered Lucy, “they have told me nothing yet.”

“Well, that’s all right,” answered her husband, sitting down beside her, and putting his arm round her waist. “Take some more wine, my love. That has done you good already. I’ll tell you how it all is, Lucy. My mother somehow or another, got together ten thousand pounds, and tried to bribe one of the clerks to put a flaw in the indictment against me. It was the lawyer Hazzard who managed it all; but the fool of a clerk would not take the money, and threatened to peach besides. My mother told her lawyer not to tell me that it had failed—some of her own cunning schemes made her want to keep it from me—but he was here this morning, and let it all out, so the only chance is—But you do not listen, Lucy.—Would you too help to ruin me?”

Lucy had remained with her eyes bent down; but she instantly raised her head, saying, “I do listen, Alfred; I hear every word, and you know I would give my life to save you. Only tell me what I have to do, and I will do it, if I have strength—but I have very little, Alfred, and I fear what little I have will fail me very soon.”

“Pooh, nonsense!” answered Alfred Latimer, all whose selfishness had returned upon him in



full force again, "you must get a chaise, dear Lucy, and that will save you ; then bid the post-boy drive you over by the bridge here, round to the common behind Mallington House. Make him stop near the gravel-pits ; and then seek out Mother Brown, who has a cottage there—you know Mother Brown?"

Lucy shook her head. "Why hers is the cottage close by the pits," continued Alfred Latimer ; "where I was taken when I got such a fall. But you must find her out at all events, and tell her, if she would save her son's life, she must get some pheasants or hares, or game of any kind, and hide them away in the very back part of the cave in Wenlock Wood—she'll know the place quite well. You must give her some money to pay for the game—for I don't think the old wretch would spend a penny, if her own life depended on it—and tell her you will give her more when you know that it is done,—I don't care what the game is like, and the longer it has been killed the better, especially if there be a good deal of blood about it."

A sharp shudder passed all over poor Lucy's frame, but her husband did not remark it, and went on to say, "Simpkin the poacher will get her as much as she wants, and the more she gets the better—do you hear?"

"Yes," answered Lucy, "I hear, and I will go and do it directly. Can I do anything else Alfred?"

"No, my love," he replied; "but bring me some money the next time you come. What have you got with you now?"

"Seven or eight guineas," answered Lucy. "I brought two hundred over with me from France, thinking you might want some, and I have spent four or five."

"Well, bring me a hundred next time you come, and take care that no one sees you with it, for most likely they would stop it."

He paused and thought for a moment, and then added, thoughtfully, "I wish to Heaven I could see Tankerville—he would soon help me to get out of this place. Couldn't you write to him, Lucy, and tell him my mother will give him a thousand pounds if he can get me over safely to France?"

"But where is he to be found?" asked Lucy, leaning her head upon her hand.

"Aye, that's the question," answered her husband. "Well, there's no help for it—if you can find out where he is, tell him what I say, but at all events do the other, and come back and see me as soon as you can—there's a dear girl. I'll tell them to get you a chaise here, and you can bid the boy drive towards Mallington House, then they'll think you are going to my mother."

Lucy made no answer, and her husband rang the bell, which was one of the conveniences granted in those days to a prisoner who could afford to pay for good accommodation. A turn-

key speedily appeared; a chaise was ordered, and quickly brought to the gates, for it was not allowed to enter the court; and Alfred Latimer took leave of Lucy, embracing her and kissing her tenderly. She suffered him to do so, for it cannot be said that she returned his caresses; a great change having come over her demeanour towards him since she first entered the prison. It is needless to enter into any long explanation of the cause, for a few words which she murmured to herself, as the vehicle drove rapidly away towards the bridge over the river, will be sufficient. The unhappy girl sank back in the seat, clasping her hands together, and saying, "Oh, my father! I am helping your murderer—but he is my husband, he is my husband!"

## CHAPTER XXIV.

ABOUT five o'clock on the evening of the same day, the woman called Mother Brown might be seen returning from the common to her own cottage, laden with a large bundle of broken sticks and dry gorse. As soon as she had entered the hovel, she deposited her load upon the floor, bolted the door, and then, taking a quantity of the thorns and wood, laid them upon the nearly extinct embers which glowed faintly upon the hearth. The dry faggots speedily caught fire, and blazed up; and then, hanging her pot upon the hook, she filled it with water, and returning to the bundle spread the furze and sticks abroad, drawing out, from the very heart of the whole, a fine barn-door hen, stripped of the feathers. The neck hung down limp and pliant as if it had not been long killed, and the old woman, with a low, chuckling laugh, muttered as she raised it, "Ah! thou'lt lay no more eggs for Dame Johnson."

After certain preliminaries, such as cutting off the head, the fowl was consigned to the pot, and the old woman continued to hover about, moving

now this thing and now that to very little purpose, and talking to herself the while in a rambling incoherent sort of way. "Ah! they may hang him if they like for me!" she said, picking up the sticks and putting them in a corner by the fire. "The varmint! to go away and rob a rich house, and never think of giving his old mother a penny of it all. He'll make a prettier corpus than Jack Williams anyhow, for he's a devil of a sight a bigger man, though t'other is so strong. That Latimer is a smart youth anyhow. I should like to see him cut a tumble; but I suppose the boys would hoot me if I went to have a peep. Well, I can stay away; I've seen many a one hanged in my day, so it's no great loss. I wish half the world were hanged.—That pot's a-boiling over!" and she ran and lifted the lid, and took some of the water out. "Well, it's a funny world," she continued, in the same moralizing vein. "People seem born to be hanged, or to get into trouble; but I'd rather be hanged, arter all, than go to Botany, and then have to work for them as sent me. The lad was not a bad lad; and I should like to get him out of the pitcher notwithstanding."

Just as she was thus speaking some one from without lifted the latch, and pushed the door sharply. Up started Mother Brown, giving an apprehensive look towards the door; while the personage without shook it again and again, exclaiming, "Come, open it, or I'll burst it in. I see you quite plain, you old jade!"



Finding her castle likely to be stormed, Mother Brown thought it best to surrender at discretion; and, opening the door, exclaimed in a tone of surprise, as Captain Tankerville walked in, "Lord! sir, is that you? I could not think who it was, and I was afraid; for I am quite a lone woman now, since they nabbed my boy Tommy."

"Well, you may shut the door if you like now," answered Captain Tankerville, "for I have come for a night's lodging, and I want to hear about your boy Tommy, as you call him, and my friend, Alfred Latimer."

"Lauk, sir! I can't take you in," answered Mrs. Brown.

"No, that you can't, granny," answered Tankerville, playing on the words, "though you've taken many a one in in your day, I dare say. But I'm not easily done; and I intend to stay here all night, I can tell you. You shall have half a crown for your pains, so don't say another word about it. Now tell me about your son, Tommy, and where they've put him, and Jack Williams, and young Latimer. I shouldn't wonder, if there's a penny to be made out of that blade yet."

"You've just got out yourself, I dare say, captain," said Mrs. Brown. "My son told me, when he brought you here, that you're a famous one for diddling the beakies. And so you want to lodge here, not to be seen?"

"No; you're out, old woman," answered Captain Tankerville, who, whether her surmise was

true or false, was not willing to make her his confidant. "The old gentleman who had me in couldn't make out his case."

"Hush!" cried Mother Brown, "there's some one a-coming."

"Is there, by Jove!" cried the worthy captain, "then I'll make myself scarce;" and away he went into the other room, closing the door carefully behind him.

Scarcely had he disappeared, when a gentle knock was heard at the door, and Mother Brown exclaimed, in a gruff and indifferent tone, "Come in, whoever ye be."

The person who appeared, as the reader may suppose, was no other than poor Lucy; who inquired, as she entered, "Is your name Brown, ma'am?"

"Yes, my pretty lady," answered the old hag; "and I'm not a ghost either, though you look as pale as if you seed one."

"I am very tired," answered Lucy, "and have been ill. But I want you to do me a service, Mrs. Brown; and you shall be well paid for it."

The idea of money always had an immense effect upon the person to whom these words were addressed; and she became extremely civil, eyeing Lucy's shawl with a certain sort of glance which was in itself an evident breach of the tenth commandment. Lucy's business was soon entered upon; and she was going on to tell all that Alfred Latimer wanted the old woman to do, when

Mother Brown raised her finger, with a monitory gesture and elevated eyebrows, saying in a whisper, "Hush! there is some one in there. We had better go out before the door and talk." But before her suggestion could be followed, Captain Tankerville walked in, with his usual swaggering air, wishing Lucy good-evening as an old acquaintance.

"Oh, this is fortunate, Captain Tankerville!" said the poor girl; "for I was told to write to you on the part of my poor husband."

"Husband!" repeated Captain Tankerville. "Oh, ay!—Very well; but we had better shut and bolt the door, and then we can talk without being interrupted."

Lucy's cheek had flushed at his first words; but she replied at once, "No, there is no need of that; I have very little to say," and she drew nearer to the door, in order to get out if he attempted to close it, for there was something she dreaded exceedingly in that man; and then, going on, she gave both to him and to the old woman the messages with which she had been charged by her husband.

Captain Tankerville, for his part, mused in silence for a moment or two; but the old woman at once exclaimed, "But the money! One can't buy swish tails, or lions either, without money."

"Here is enough for that purpose," answered Lucy, drawing forth her purse, and giving the

old woman all that it contained, except what was just sufficient to pay the expenses of the chaise. "When you have done what I tell you, and I am sure that the game is there, you will receive five guineas more."

"Five guineas!" said Mother Brown; "that's very little, considering I have to walk so far."

"Why, you old besom!" said Captain Tankerville, "you wouldn't hang your own son for the sake of a walk, would you?"

"I don't care whether he's hanged or not," answered the hag. "Howsomever, I'll do it, but where am I to get the five guineas, my pretty lady?"

"Come down to me, at Mallington Park," answered Lucy, "and you shall have it. Come to Mrs. Edmonds's, but remember you do not speak a word of this to any one but myself. Ask for Mrs. Latimer."

The old woman answered only by a low unpleasant chuckle, and Lucy took a step towards the door, but turning again to Captain Tankerville, ere she went out, she added, in a trembling voice, "I hope, sir, you will be able to do what I asked. You had better see Mrs. Charlton soon, for no time is to be lost."

"I suppose not," answered Tankerville, dryly. "I will do my best; for, to be frank, a thousand pounds is something worth having; and I like Latimer too. He's a devilish good fellow."

"He's quite sure you can do what he wishes,

if you please," replied Lucy. "I trust—I hope, he is not guilty."

"Oh! as to guilty or not, I've nothing to do with that," said Captain Tankerville, with a laugh that made the poor girl shudder. "But as to getting him out, that may be a different affair. Stone walls are stone walls. If I were in myself, I could manage it, I dare say; for then I would direct the whole, but now it can only be done by a good lot of money."

"That will not be wanting, I am sure," replied Lucy. "Mrs. Charlton will supply all that is needed, but now I must go, for I have been away long."

"Well, well, I dare say we shall manage it," said Tankerville, whose imagination warmed at the idea of the thousand pounds, and who saw the prospect of extracting considerable sums from Mrs. Charlton at all events. "I'll do my best, Lucy, and I'll come down and tell you how it all goes on; for we may want your help to tell him news, and let him know what we are about."

There was a familiarity in his tone that pained Lucy, and with a brief word or two of reply, she hurried away, got into the chaise, and drove back sadly to her mother's house. She had gone through the fatigue and the exertion of the day with resolution that conquered even bodily weakness; but the moment that she had crossed the threshold, and was clasped in her mother's arms, she fainted away, and lay for some time as



if she were dead. When she recovered, Mrs. Edmonds asked no questions; and Lucy herself was the first to speak of her going. "My mother," she said, "I have been to see my husband, you must forgive me, for whatever he has done, I am his wife, and must do my duty to him. I must go again, too, and you must not try to stop me, for if you do, I shall die."

"It's only for your own sake, I would try to stop you, Lucy," replied her mother, "you have almost killed yourself now."

"It would do much more harm to stay away," replied Lucy, "but I will not go to-morrow, I will take that day to rest and recover." Much indeed did she need it; and till the following evening she remained in bed.

In the mean while Captain Tankerville sat for more than an hour in Mother Brown's cottage, spending part of the time in cogitations, and part in devouring his full share of the old woman's stolen fowl. As soon as it was quite dark, the worthy captain set out for Mallington House, and ringing at the bell, desired to see Mrs. Charlton. His appearance, just having come out of prison, was, to use a very expressive, though somewhat vulgar term, rather seedy; and the servant, after eyeing him for a moment, told him that Mrs. Charlton was engaged, and could not see him. Captain Tankerville, however, was not a man to take a refusal easily; and assuming an authoritative air, he replied: "Go

in and tell her, that I must see her on business of importance. I have not a card with me, but my name is Captain Tankerville, of the royal navy, a friend of her son's, from whom I have a message."

The servant obeyed; but took care to inform his mistress that the applicant was "rather an odd-looking fellow." Nevertheless, there was something aristocratic in the name, which proved a passport to Mrs. Charlton's presence. Captain Tankerville was accordingly admitted, and though very different people, perhaps no two persons were ever better qualified to deal with each other, than that worthy gentleman and that fair lady. The captain opened his business with the utmost coolness, informing Mrs. Charlton that he had received a message from her son, with a promise of a thousand pounds from her, if he succeeded in effecting his liberation. "Now, my dear madam," he continued. "I think I can manage the matter, but the first thing to be ascertained is, whether you are disposed to ratify the engagement. A thousand pounds! You know promises from a man in prison are worth nothing, and you may view the matter very differently from my friend Latimer."

"I shall not grudge the thousand pounds, sir," replied Mrs. Charlton, "if my son is actually liberated, but I certainly shall not pay it before."

"That's very prudent," replied Captain Tankerville, who seemed to have an instinctive appre-

ciation of the lady's character. "It would not be pleasant to give a thousand pounds and have him hanged too."

"Good Heavens! sir, you need not use such shocking expressions," exclaimed Mrs. Charlton; "I trust there is no chance whatever of such a dreadful event!"

"I don't know, my dear madam," replied Tankerville, dryly, "he seems to think there is, and he's the best judge, I fancy. But business is business. Although, of course, I do not expect you to be such a goose as to buy a pig in a poke, and pay before your son's out, you will not object to sign a little memorandum that I am to have the thousand pounds if I get him out? Then we shall both be pinned fast, you see. If you don't pay me, you might chance to be required to visit New South Wales for your share in the transaction; and then again you have got a hold upon me, for I can't peach of you without subjecting myself to the same voyage, which, though a naval man, would not be agreeable to me."

Mrs. Charlton considered the matter with due deliberation, but at length she made up her mind to consent; and before showing his game any farther, Captain Tankerville thought it best to have the paper drawn up and signed, which was accordingly done.

"And now, my dear madam," he continued, as soon as he had got the document in his

pocket, "the next thing to be considered is the means."

"The means," repeated Mrs. Charlton, "I thought you had arranged all that already. You told me you thought it could be done."

"True, true," replied the worthy captain. "But when I say means, I would imply the sinews of war, my dear madam. I am a poor captain on half pay, and I cannot be supposed to supply all the finances. The sum required won't be a trifle, I can tell you; and you can judge yourself what your son's life is worth, as well as if you kept an insurance office. There are jailors to be bribed, and turnkeys to be feed."

"Then I am very sorry that it can't be done," said Mrs. Charlton, in a low but decided tone. "The thousand pounds I can command, but I cannot go much farther, for the truth is, I have not the money; and besides," she added, with a slight smile, "how could I tell in what way the money was applied? I could not be sure it was used at all for the purpose intended."

Mrs. Charlton's mind rose highly in her guest's estimation, and he mentally observed, "A very different lady from her daughter-in-law! We must try to give her some security."

"Quite right, my dear madam," continued Captain Tankerville aloud. "You had better come over to the place yourself; I can prepare the way for you, and when the turnkeys are off duty, can have the honour of introducing them to you

quietly, when you can pay them with your own hands; for they must be trusted, even if you don't trust me."

"Ay! but I have some hold upon them, Captain Tankerville," replied Mrs. Charlton. "If I can prove that they have taken money from me and they don't do what they promise, they can be punished you know."

"Well, so be it," answered the captain. "You may be quite sure I shall do my best to get the thousand pounds; but some money must be had in hand, even to begin with. They will never risk coming to see you, nor talking much with me either, without having something to make it worth their while."

"How much will be required, do you think?" asked Mrs. Charlton.

"Why, there will be the porter, and the principal turnkey, and one of his fellows," replied Tankerville, thoughtfully. "I should think three hundred pounds would do."

"Three hundred pounds!" exclaimed Mrs. Charlton. "What! to begin with?"

"You can't expect men to risk transportation for nothing," replied the captain.

"There is no risk of transportation for coming to speak with a lady at an inn," rejoined his fair companion. "In one word, Captain Tankerville, I must see my way clearly in the business. I am not a person easily deceived; and, besides, I



have not got more than a hundred pounds in the house."

"Well, we must make that go as far as it will," he answered, perfectly unconcernedly. "We will meet at this place, Sturton, as soon as you like, Mrs. Charlton; and I trust with the hundred pounds, if you will have the goodness to fetch it, I shall be able to get two of them at least to come and see you."

Mrs. Charlton went away, and returned in a minute or two with the money.

"Oh! very well; this is the money," he said, holding out his hand as soon as Mrs. Charlton appeared. But the lady, instead of giving him the notes, took up the pen, dipped it in the ink and proceeded to write a regular receipt for one hundred pounds, specifying, in good set terms, that it was to be applied to the purpose of bribing the jailors and turnkeys of Sturton gaol to facilitate the escape of Alfred Latimer, Esq. To this she requested Captain Tankerville's signature, but that gentleman hesitated; and Mrs. Charlton then added, grasping the notes tight in her hand, "Our hold must be mutual upon each other, Captain Tankerville. I shall not pay a single penny without a similar receipt."

The captain laughed, and signed the paper; saying, in a complimentary tone, "Well, you are the cleverest woman I ever had to deal with." And after some further conversation, in the course of

which it was agreed that Mrs. Charlton should go over to Sturton on the following day and sleep at the inn there, the worthy captain took his leave, assuring her that he would lose no time in commencing the preliminary negotiations.

## CHAPTER XXV.

THE yard of the prison was not so full as ordinary, and the greater part of the prisoners who tenanted it at the time were busily amusing themselves in one corner, with different games, which were in those days permitted to the unconvicted. While one part of the prison-yard was thus engaged, the other displayed Jack Williams and Alfred Latimer—the former taking his short walk up and down, the latter keeping by his side, and talking with him eagerly.

“It won’t answer, Mr. Latimer; it won’t answer,” said Williams, in reply to something that his companion had just communicated. “They have proofs enough against us all, that’s the truth; and we had better look at it straightforwardly. I had a hint yesterday afternoon that they have got hold of everything in the place where we hid them away.”

“They haven’t got what I had,” answered Latimer, eagerly; “that’s all safe in France, and they found nothing upon me that they could swear to.”

Williams looked at him steadfastly for a moment, and then said, "You are thinking of getting yourself out of the scrape, and leaving us in; but it won't do, Mr. Latimer."

"I am thinking of no such thing," answered Alfred Latimer, sharply, with the colour mounting in his cheek; "such a thing never crossed my thoughts—but I was thinking it was a pity you hadn't been as careful as I was. Even now I don't see, if they cannot prove that you put the things there, how it can tell against you or Brown either. Any one who took the things might have hidden them as well as you."

"There's some truth in that," answered Williams thoughtfully, "Well, let us hear what's your plan with this business of the game."

"Why, the object is," answered Alfred Latimer, whose wit had been sharpened by his danger, "to account for two or three of the strong points against us. In the first place, if we are all in the same story, that we were just out bagging a few pheasants—which is very likely, seeing that we have all been in the same scrape before—it will show how we all came to go across the water together, and will knock down that cowardly rascal, Maltby's evidence. Then again," he said, "it will show a cause for the blood on my clothes; and almost everything else will be affected by it one way or another. So you see I was not thinking of getting out of the scrape and leaving you in it, though I cannot fancy what good it

would do you to have me hanged as well as yourself."

"Perhaps not," answered Williams, with a grim smile; "but we are all in the same boat, Mr. Latimer, and must sink or swim together—not that I mean to say, if judge or jury were inclined to let you off for any want of proof, that I would speak a single word to stop them. That's all fair. But if you were to contrive any plan for saving yourself without giving us a chance, I would spoil that for you, I can tell you.—Now let's think of this scheme a little more. It's not a bad one, and we may as well let it go on, for it may make the folks doubt, and that's something; but the hope is so very faint a one, that we must leave nothing else untried."

"But why is it so faint?" asked Alfred Latimer. "Maltby did not see us go into the house—nobody saw you and Brown hide the rings and things; and on me they have found nothing but ten guineas in my own purse."

"Well, the game had better be left there," said Williams, after some meditation, "and we can keep to that story, if the worst comes to the worst. But the first thing to be done is, to try to get out of this place."

"Ay, but how is that to be done?" asked Alfred Latimer. "I should be glad enough to get out, if I saw any chance of it."

Williams gave his under jaw a twist as if there had been something in his mouth, and then



answered, "It's to be done, Mr. Latimer, and as you must have some share in the thing, and must give us some help, I may as well tell you part of the plan now, especially as we are never sure how long we may have an opportunity of talking over it, for if these fellows in the gaol knew what they were about, they would not let you and I be walking up and down here, laying our heads together in this way; and if the visiting justices hear of it, they'll have a finger in the pie—that's clear. Now look, sir. That wall's a good height, you see; but yet a ladder could soon be made that would reach to the top, if we could only get some thin but very strong cord."

"I could easily get that," answered Alfred Latimer; "my wife would bring that in—what sort of cord do you want, how thick?"

"It does not much matter," answered the man, "how thick, so that she can carry it without being seen, and it be strongly twisted. I shall have to work it up myself. That would be soon done, if I could sit to it long enough at a time, but the people are always coming into my cell, and as I have got no light to work at night, I shall be obliged to do it by the feel."

"Oh! I'll get her to bring me in a phosphorus box and some candles," said Alfred Latimer. "But when you have made the ladder, I don't see how you could use it. You are locked up at night, I suppose, as well as myself; and if you

were to try it in the day, you'd be stopped in five minutes."

"There's such a thing as mortar between stones," answered Williams, dryly, "and such a thing as working the mortar out.—Brown's at it now, and I shall take my turn by-and-by; we are half-way through the wall already, as near as I can calculate, and in two days more we shall be within half an inch of the outside."

"Why, Brown and you aren't in the same cell, surely," said the young gentleman.

"Oh no! not at night," answered Williams, "but during the airing time, as they call it, as our cells are close by the yard door, and as there is no means of getting out that way, they don't much watch if we go in for a minute or two, and then nobody notices if he goes into his cell or mine."

"But how will he get into your cell when you want to start?" asked Alfred Latimer.

"Oh! we've a plan for that," replied Williams, "that won't be difficult to manage."

"And how am I to manage, Williams?" demanded his companion. "It seems to me that you two have been laying out for yourselves to get out of the scrape and leave me in it."

"I shouldn't be telling you all about it if I had," answered Williams. "But you must do something for yourself, Mr. Latimer. You shall know whenever all is quite ready, and the time fixed; then you must pay one of the turnkeys well to let you come at night and have a little

private talk with me. You know a stout, swivel-eyed fellow, with a hooked nose—he's the man you must speak to. Just give him a hint that you want to consult me about our defence. Now, for ten pounds, he won't mind letting you do that, for they think that's all fair; and, to make everything sure, you can tell him he may lock you in, and come for you in a couple of hours again. He did so for Brown two or three nights ago, for the little sum I could give him, which was but two guineas."

"How did you get that?" asked Alfred Latimer. "They took all I had from me, and now let me have what I want on my mother's account. The blackguards searched me to the skin."

"So they did me," answered Williams, "and if I had had two guineas about me they would have soon found it; but I had what was worth more than two guineas—some bits of paper belonging to a friend of yours, one Mr. Morton—for which, at one time, he offered a reward of fifty pounds. I had slipped them in between my jacket and the lining, where they never thought of looking; and, after I had been in for a while, I sent for Mr. Morton, on pretence of wanting to confess something to him, and then asked him if he was willing to give the same sum for the papers as ever. He was glad enough to do it; so I got the money, and he got the papers. But that's nothing to do with what we were talking about. I wanted to try that turnkey; for I've a strange notion of picking

out men by their faces, and I thought I was pretty sure of my mark. You may talk to him, therefore, quite safely, the first time you can get him into your room. Then, when I tell you all's ready, you can get him to bring you to my cell, about one or two in the morning; and, while you are locked in there, as he thinks, we can be walking away towards Portsmouth."

"But won't he see the hole you have made in the wall?" asked Alfred Latimer.

"Oh dear, no!" replied Williams. "In the first place, there is never a stone out of its place when they come in; and, besides, the bed-head is against it."

The scheme seemed feasible to Alfred Latimer, and he had heard of such things being attempted with success; but yet the risk appeared to him so great that he said at length, "Won't it be better, Jack, to keep this shift till the last—I mean till the trial is over?"

"Why, you fool," answered Jack Williams, sharply, "we shall be in irons then. It's a wonder we aren't now; only there are one or two old women amongst the justices, who are trying what they call a new system here, in order to reclaim us as they say. Devilish little chance of reclaiming me, I think, irons or no irons." He and his companion laughed; and he proceeded, "Brown got his darbies off yesterday by good behaviour, and we must take care to use our arms and legs while they are at liberty; so you get the

cord, and the phosphorus-box, and the lights—one of those long rolls of taper will be better than candles. Furnish yourself with all the money you can scrape together, and we shall do the matter easily enough. If I were you, Mr. Latimer, however, I would not neglect the other scheme. That can do no harm, and we might be stopped, you know. Another thing is—I don't see why you should be worse off, if it does come to a trial, than any of us—and, as things stand now, you are so; for that young lady—that Miss Charlton, knows nothing of me or Brown, but her evidence may be devilish unlucky for you. I should think, when you are so nearly related to her, that you could easily get her out of the way."

"Not so easy," answered Alfred Latimer, thoughtfully; "but I'll try—yes, that I will, I'll try. She's kind enough; but there's a great deal of determination about her too, when she takes a thing into her head."

"I'd try every way," answered Williams. "But here comes Dick, the other turnkey, as if he were making for us. Don't say a word to him, mind; for though he's devilish civil, yet you'll find him a dogged fellow, who won't take a sixpence."

The turnkey beckoned to Alfred Latimer, as he approached, and told him that his lady was waiting to see him, in very reverential tones. There must be something most extraordinary in gold, that the very name and reputation of wealth, even when joined with crime, should



obtain the respect that virtuous poverty cannot command.

Alfred Latimer followed the worthy jailor into the prison, and, in a few minutes, was in his room again with Lucy, who seemed to have gained strength, notwithstanding all she had suffered. Lucy had a long tale to tell; for, since she had last seen him, many things had happened. Mrs. Charlton had opened a communication with her—had been to see her—and, upon the strength of the occasion, had been as gentle, and kind, and sweetly maternal as possible. Not choosing to visit the prison again too soon, the lady had instructed her son's wife to communicate to him secretly the efforts that were making to liberate him, and to warn him to be prepared to take advantage of them at a moment's notice. Lucy had been instructed, too, to convey to him the means of disguising his person; and, over her own ordinary dress, she now wore a second gown and shawl, which she had been told to leave with him. She had received all these directions, and promised to follow them, with her natural gentleness; but Mrs. Charlton remarked, in their interview, a sort of apathetic coldness, which she attributed, perhaps, to the right cause, and feared that it might interfere with Lucy's exertions on Alfred Latimer's behalf. Now, Mrs. Charlton never scrupled, when she had an object in view, to say what was not; and, therefore, in taking leave of her daughter-in-law—whom she might

have treated at any other time as the dirt beneath her feet, or as a politician treats an elector who has served him, and can serve him no more—she kissed her tenderly, adding, “You must be very well aware, my dear Lucy, that nothing could induce me to take all these steps, even for a son, were I not fully convinced that he is perfectly innocent. The truth is,” she continued, seeing some surprise in Lucy’s face, “poor Alfred had engaged to go out with these men to shoot in the preserves here—it was very wrong and very foolish, certainly, but more a boyish frolic than anything else. However, he had nothing to do with the rest of the sad affair. That they did alone, when he left them; but, as he was seen with them just before and just after, there is no means of proving his innocence, unless they would confess the truth—and, even then, their words would not be believed; besides, these people are always so malicious. But I have heard quite enough to show me the true state of the case, and that poor Alfred was never nearer to the house than the willow-ground, by the water.”

Had Lucy been very clear-sighted—had she had a full knowledge of all the evidence that had been given, she would easily have perceived that Mrs. Charlton’s story could not be true. But what we wish for, that we believe—at least, in nine cases out of ten—and she gladly caught at the idea that her suspicions had done her husband injustice. She thus returned to her husband with

warmer feelings, and a more eager desire to serve and save him than when she left him; and she detailed all the information she possessed as rapidly as possible, stripped off the gown and shawl in haste, and aided to hide them amongst his clothes.

It may easily be conceived that the tidings were joyful to Alfred Latimer, and he loaded poor Lucy with caresses, calling her the best and dearest girl in the world. He did not forget, however, the conversation which had taken place between him and Williams; and directed Lucy to bring him the phosphorus-box and taper, and inquired eagerly for the money which had been spoken of at their last interview. It was instantly produced by Lucy, neatly rolled up into the smallest possible compass. But Alfred Latimer had still directions to give; and, after meditating for a moment, he said to himself, "Even if the scheme of Tankerville's succeeds, I must not let Williams and Brown know what is going on; and, to hide it all, I must seem as busy about their plan as ever. But, in case both fail, I had better try to get the evidence against me out of the way." He then proceeded aloud—"There's one thing, dear Lucy, I wish could be done. If you could give my mother a hint that, at all events, she had better persuade Louisa to marry, and go abroad for a while, I should be very glad. Louisa would do it, I am sure, if she's asked; and my mother can always coax her to do a thing, if she takes the right way. If young Blackmore, too, were gone, it would be

all the better. Maltby, I am afraid, they can't get hold of; for I have heard that they have shut him up."

"But do you think Miss Charlton will consent?" asked Lucy, doubtingly. "She's not with Mrs. Charlton now, you know."

"The devil she isn't!" cried her husband. "I suppose, then, my mother has quarrelled with her, like a fool; but I'm sure, after all, Louisa could be persuaded; for she could never wish me to be condemned, when I am innocent."

He said the words boldly enough, for he had accustomed himself to the assertion. Nevertheless, there was some slight hesitation observable as he spoke; and Lucy asked, in a low and anxious tone, while her heart sank with doubt,—“And are you really innocent, indeed, Alfred?”

Not more than a fortnight before such a question would have cast him into a fearful state of agitation—for remorse, at that time, had mingled with apprehension; but selfishness had now resumed her full sway, and his only thought was to save himself. He answered, then, vehemently—almost eagerly—“To be sure I am; how could you ever doubt it, girl? I can tell you, Lucy, there's many an innocent man in England hanged upon what they call circumstantial evidence; and here, because two or three things are proved, which could be easily accounted for, I am already treated like a guilty person, and should very likely be found guilty by a jury.”

Lucy replied nothing, but murmured to herself,  
“Thank God! thank God!”

“Thank God that I am likely to be hanged!”  
exclaimed Alfred Latimer.

“No, no!” she cried, placing her hands upon  
his arm; “thank God that you are innocent,  
Alfred.”

“You should never have doubted it,” he answered, pushing her from him; “but that does not matter. You tell my mother what I say—bid her go on with what she’s about with Tankerville; but, in case the worst comes to the worst, let her get Louisa out of the way as soon as possible. She can easily manage it if she tries, and then it will be pretty nearly all sure.”

Lucy was pained, for every moment showed her more clearly that he thought of nothing but himself; but still, the increasing assurance that he was innocent was the greatest of comforts to her; and, after having made him repeat all his instructions, she again took leave of him with a lightened heart. A momentary fit of tenderness seized him at the last instant of her stay, and he even so far forgot himself as to ask her to remain a little longer;—Did I say he forgot himself? Perhaps it was wrong to say so; for, after all, it was but a softer kind of selfishness, less hard—less brutish than the other. He felt a comfort—a relief in her society. There was something in the clinging affection of the poor girl—in her devotion to him in that hour of sorrow and of peril, that seemed



to cheer and mitigate the dark solitude of crime. He seated himself by her—he threw his arms round her—he leaned his head upon her shoulder, while her hand lay clasped in his; and, as they were thus placed, one of the jailors suddenly entered—perhaps with some doubt as to what might be the object of Lucy's visit. All seemed natural and easy, however. Both started at the interruption. Alfred Latimer withdrew his arm; and the turnkey, making some excuse for his entrance, returned to the rooms of the governor, from whence he had come. Shortly after Lucy quitted the prison; but this time she went on foot, and took her way towards the best inn of the place.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

THE Bell at Sturton was, as the reader is aware, a large and handsome inn. It had multitudes of bed-rooms, it had multitudes of sitting-rooms, multitudes of waiters and chamber-maids; but amongst all its multitudes, the greatest was the multitude of bells.

The great bell of the Bell, however, was the bell of the house door, which was so sized and situated, that every waiter and every chamber-maid, unless deep in wine, love, or sleep, could not avoid hearing it, wherever he or she might be—from the remote garret of Boots, down to the profound storehouse of Bacchus.

One night—about the period of which we have just been writing,—towards half-past nine, that great bell rang vehemently. The roll of wheels had previously called forth the ostler, and now out of sundry chambers rushed two or three waiters, in black silk stockings, like spiders darting along the toils at the first touch of a fly's foot. The glass-doors were thrown open, the landlord himself was summoned, and the

housekeeper lighted a bed candle. The first object that presented itself to the eyes of landlord and waiters, when they came out upon the steps, was a travelling chariot, apparently of a green colour. The lamps were lighted, and the post-boy stood beside his horses, already undoing the harness. Ostler was in a hurry to call out "horses on," but the head waiter opened the door of the vehicle, politely saying, "Won't you please to alight, sir?"

"What's o'clock," said a voice from within.

The waiter took a step back, looked at his watch by the light in the hall, saw the time, added half an hour, to give the inn a better chance, and replied, "Ten o'clock, sir."

"Then I'll stop here for the night," replied the gentleman from within; "though dickery, dickery dock, the mouse must have run up the clock, for it was only eight when we left——, and that's but ten miles."

"This way, sir, this way, sir," said the waiter, without any reply to the gentleman's last observation. But our good friend, Mr. Quatterly, who stepped out of the carriage as the man spoke, remained for the space of about three minutes, paying the postboy, and seeing sundry tin cases and small leathern boxes, which he had with him in the interior of the carriage, safely lifted out and carried on before him. He then duly followed where the waiter led, Mr. Gatton's housekeeper exclaiming, "Number 42, Jackson,"

as the party passed. Mr. Quatterly was introduced into a sitting-room, the neatness of which, together with the sparkling fire [in the grate, were very satisfactory to his corporeal feelings. He looked at his watch, nevertheless; and shaking his finger at the waiter, he exclaimed, "You vagabond, you said it was ten o'clock, and it wants twenty minutes."

"Bless my heart, sir!" said the waiter, twitching out his own chronometer, as if horribly shocked at the thought of such an error; and then looking confounded, he added, "Really, I beg pardon, sir, I made a mistake. That light there below is so werry bad. Will you take tea or supper, sir?"

"Ay, I understand," said Mr. Quatterly, good-humouredly, "but you shall have sixpence less for cheating me. I thought we couldn't have taken all that time, or that I must have been dreaming, like David Dribble, who 'dreamed he drove a dragon;' for it seemed as if the horses were going as fast as they could.—Tea or supper? I'll have dinner first, if you please, for I have not put a morsel between my grinders since seven o'clock this morning. Let me have what can be soonest ready—a little soup, no fish—I hate fish in the midland counties—and anything else that the house can afford, together with a bottle of sherry and an apple-tart—not baked above three days, if you please, Mr. Waiter."

"Baked this morning, sir," said the waiter.

"At ten o'clock?" inquired Mr. Quatterly, slyly. "Now be so good as to put these boxes in order upon that table—regularly, regularly—the big ones behind, the little ones before, the light companies in front and the grenadiers in the rear. And now show me my bed-room. I always like to see the thing I have got to lie upon.

"This way, sir, this way," said the waiter. "Chambermaid, forty-nine." And candle in hand, he lighted Mr. Quatterly about ten steps along the passage, towards the door of a bedroom on the opposite side. In ten steps, however, very wonderful things may happen, and in this instance something did happen which surprised Mr. Quatterly a good deal. A door opened on the same side as his own sitting-room, and a head and face, with part of the body, appeared at the aperture. Mr. Quatterly saw the countenance distinctly, for the waiter held the light in a very illuminating direction, and there were the identical features of his worthy and accomplished friend, Captain Tankerville, which, though withdrawn again as soon as seen, produced from Mr. Quatterly's chest the significant interjection, "Ah, ah!"

"Sir," said the waiter.

"Number forty-five," said Mr. Quatterly, "who's staying in forty-five, waiter?"

"Mrs. Charlton, sir, the Honourable Mrs. Charlton," replied the officer in black silk stockings.



“Oh! when the pie was opened, the birds began to sing,” said Mr. Quatterly, and without any more pellucid comment, the worthy solicitor followed the waiter and the chambermaid, by whom they were just then joined, into the bedroom, examined the bed, gave some orders, and then returned to his sitting-room, pausing every second step to think for a moment. When he had reached the door, his cogitation seemed to have arrived at some result, for he turned to the waiter, saying, “Get the dinner and serve it. I shall be back by the time it is on table.” And going into the room, he took his hat, and issued forth from the inn on foot.

In the streets of Sturton Mr. Quatterly walked on, looking to the right and left at the different houses he passed, as if he were enjoying a strange town, one of the greatest pleasures to a thoughtful man that can be conceived. However, Mr. Quatterly, it would appear, was differently occupied, and after having gone for a couple of hundred yards, or somewhat more, he crossed over to a chemist’s shop, which was one of the few that was open in the place, and walked in with a low bow to the proprietor thereof, who was standing taking leave of his goods and chattels for the night.

“Pray, sir,” he said, “can you inform me where the mayor is to be found, and if not, which is the house of the nearest magistrate?” The

chemist did both, and the magistrate's dwelling being near at hand, the mayor's far away, Mr. Quatterly proceeded to the door of the former, and was soon after admitted. His visit was not long, for in about five minutes he issued forth again, and in all was about a quarter of an hour absent from the inn. His dinner did not seem to have made much progress during his absence, for the cloth was still unlaid. But all was bustle as soon as he summoned the waiters by the bell; and in about ten minutes more the soup was before him. That part of the feast was discussed, and Mr. Quatterly was entering upon the wing of a fowl, when one of the host of waiters came in and inquired, "Pray, sir, is your name Quatterly?"

"It used to be," replied the worthy solicitor; "and if it has been changed, it was done without my consent."

"Mrs. Charlton, sir," said the waiter, "would be glad to speak with you for a few minutes, with her compliments."

"Well, then," answered Mr. Quatterly, "pray tell Mrs. Charlton, that I am particularly occupied at this moment, but that I will wait upon her in a quarter of an hour, *with my compliments*;" and Mr. Quatterly applied himself to his meal again with all due devotion. After having thanked Heaven for a good meal, he directed the waiter to inform Mrs. Charlton that he was ready to attend her. The lady sent back word that she was eager to see

him, and the moment after Mr. Quatterly entered the sitting-room, No. forty-five.

With one of her sweetest and most engaging smiles the lady received her guest, and declared that she was delighted to see him, besought him to take a seat by her on the sofa, and spared no blandishments to produce a favourable impression. But, as we have shown before, Mr. Quatterly combined, with very great simplicity of manners and a peculiar fondness for many very juvenile things, a shrewd and keen intellect, great knowledge of the world, and a vast experience of rogues and vagabonds of every class and degree; and all Mrs. Charlton's arts were lost upon him.

"Delighted, my dear madam," he replied, "to renew my acquaintance with you under less disagreeable circumstances than those with which it commenced. I trust I see you in good health."

"As well as I can be expected to be," replied the lady. "Ah! that was a terrible day, indeed, Mr. Quatterly; I was quite beside myself. But even the timid pigeon, you know, will peck when its young ones are assailed."

"The hen pigeon, madam," replied Mr. Quatterly, somewhat dryly. "But I did not think you were beside yourself at all; you seemed to me to do it all very well."

Mrs. Charlton did not altogether like his answer; and, after pausing for a moment and nibbling her pretty lips, she said, "I was very glad to hear from

a friend that you were here, Mr. Quatterly, for I thought that you might be the means——”

“ I beg your pardon for interrupting you,” replied the solicitor; “ but the friend, I presume, is Captain Tankerville.”

“ Yes,” said Mrs. Charlton, with some hesitation. “ Poor man! he is, he is——” and there she stopped.

“ Exactly, ma’am,” rejoined Mr. Quatterly, ending the sentence for her, “ he is a swindler, ma’am, and a felon.”

“ Good gracious! I hope not,” exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, in affected surprise and consternation. “ He seemed to take a great deal of interest in my son, and so——”

“ It is exactly as I say, my dear madam,” replied Mr. Quatterly. “ Your son, I beg leave to say, he pigeoned in the most egregious manner, and was one of those who greatly aided to lead him, or drive him, into acts which have produced his present unpleasant situation. As for your son, he has been but a tool in the hands of others, I am sure.”

“ I can assure you he is perfectly innocent,” said Mrs. Charlton, earnestly; “ that is to say, of the offences with which he is charged. That he was very culpable in going out at night to shoot the earl’s game I admit, but that was his only offence.”

“ Then let it be his defence likewise, my dear madam,” answered the solicitor. “ Prove that, and he’s quite safe.”

“ But how can we prove it ? ” demanded the lady. “ Meeting with these men on his way back, he crossed over in their boat without knowing anything of what they had done. But who could suppose for a moment, my dear Mr. Quatterly, that any one would go and marry in the morning the daughter of a man he had murdered at night ? ”

“ It is not a usual proceeding, indeed, ” answered the solicitor ; “ and I trust it may be, as you say, impossible. Nevertheless, his situation is indeed very awkward, and how he is to get out of it I don’t see. It will depend upon thirteen contingencies, namely, twelve jurors and the judge. A hanging judge and a hungry jury are hard things to deal with. But we may have something more favourable in this case ; and I trust such may be the result, not alone for your sake, but for that of Miss Charlton, to whom the whole business must be most painful. ”

“ Ay, that is just what I wanted to speak to you about, Mr. Quatterly, ” said the lady. “ It will be very terrible to poor dear Louisa, and still more so to Alfred, who has ever looked upon her as a sister, to see her appear as a witness against him, whose testimony will be very likely to turn the scale, and doom him to death. Do you not think, Mr. Quatterly, that it would be much better for her and for all parties, if she were at once to give her hand to Lord Mallington, and take a little tour on the continent ? It would do the health of both good, I am sure. ”



“ May I ask, madam, if you consult me as a friend, a lawyer, or a physician ?” inquired Mr. Quatterly.

The *natural* impulse of Mrs. Charlton’s *art*—if I may use such a contradictory expression—would have led her to reply at once, “ Oh ! as a friend of course ; but a moment’s thought stopped the words on her lips, and she said, “ As a solicitor.”

“ Six-and-eightpence, then, madam,” said Mr. Quatterly, dryly ; and Mrs. Charlton with a smile took out her purse, and laid seven shillings on the table. The worthy solicitor swept it up, put it in one huge pocket, and drew forth fourpence from the other, which he duly handed across to the lady.

“ Now, madam,” he said, “ I am your lawyer ; and in that capacity I beg leave to reply, that the very best thing for your son, be he guilty or innocent, would be to get some of the witnesses out of the way, especially Miss Charlton. The lad Blackmore is another who may be disposed of with advantage ; and those are the only two you can deal with. But you must excuse me if I decline to undertake the operative part of the affair, as it is out of my way of practice. I can’t blame you if you do it ; but I should blame myself very much if I did.”

“ But surely, my dear Mr. Quatterly, you will not refuse to take a message from me to Louisa and the earl,” said Mrs. Charlton, “ or to urge them most strongly to hasten their nuptials, for which they have my fullest consent ; and, and—

“And go to the continent,” said Mr. Quatterly. “Well, my dear madam, I will take the message; and though I do not promise to urge them most strongly, yet I will say nothing against it.”

“Oh! pray, do urge them,” said Mrs. Charlton, eagerly. “I am sure a word from you would do a great deal.”

“My dear madam,” rejoined the solicitor, “I never yet saw a man whom it was necessary to urge to take a glass of wine if he was thirsty and liked wine; or to take a walk, if it was a fine day and he liked walking; no, nor any two young people either, who were in love with each other, to marry at once, if there was not the slightest impediment in nature. I therefore think your proposition has a very good chance, even if it come plain and unadorned from my lips.”

Mrs. Charlton mused for an instant, and then replied, as Mr. Quatterly rose and stood before her about to depart, “I am sure you will do what you can. But, now, tell me about Captain Tankerville.”

“I have nothing to tell you, my dear madam,” replied Mr. Quatterly; “you have his character according to my best powers of portraiture: he’s a swindler and a felon. He fleeced your son, and he’s now fleecing you, I suspect—or at least would be if he weren’t in gaol; which he is by this time, if the magistrates have done their duty.”

“Good gracious!” cried Mrs. Charlton, “I can hardly believe he is such a character.”

“The powers of credulity required are not very great,” replied the solicitor. “And now, my dear madam, good-night; for I have a great many papers to look over.”

“Well, thank God!” said Mrs. Charlton, as soon as Mr. Quatterly was gone, “I have seen both the porter and the turnkey myself, and know where to find them, and how to deal with them; so it’s no great matter if he is in gaol—it will save money.”

## CHAPTER XXVII.

THE morning was bright and beautiful, though an occasional shower, more like one of those which chequer the sunshine of an April day, swept over the sky, and passed away again, leaving the whole world sparkling. Breakfast was just over at the Rectory — Dr. Western had gone into his library to speak to some of his poor. Mrs. Evelyn had retired from the breakfast room — whether on business or from discretion, I cannot tell — and Morton and Louisa stood together at the window, gazing toward the park and the hall. It was natural for Louisa's mind to be led on by the sight she beheld, into the future, with which it associated itself. There was to be the dwelling of her after years, there was the ancestral mansion of him she loved so deeply, there the spot in which all the bright imaginations of youth, all the fond visions of affection, congregated themselves before the eye of hope. Was it unnatural, that with so many dark and painful circumstances as then surrounded her, she should feel a yearning

for the coming time, a longing to hurry forward — to the period when the cloud should be passed away, and the sunshine all bright again.

Morton, on his part, summed up all his feelings towards Louisa, by saying that he had come to Mallington in search of an idle name, and had found a real treasure by the way. Loved her, he certainly had, from a very early period of their acquaintance. He had soon learned to think her the most beautiful, and what is of more importance, the most interesting being he had ever beheld: but now such sensations had warmed by intimacy into a passion as ardent as it was deep; and, as he stood there, and gazed with her from the window on the scene I have described, he felt even a more eager longing than she did, to hasten forward to the time when the tie that was to unite them for ever should be theirs, and every cold restraint and worldly barrier done away.

Certainly a more propitious moment could not have been found for any proposal that might tend to hasten their union, but as they were still gazing forth, and speaking of the changes and improvements that were by this time going on at Mallington Park, the green chariot of worthy Mr. Quatterly drove in through the gates, and stopped at the door before their eyes. His voice was then heard in the hall giving various directions for the safe custody of the numerous little boxes which the chariot contained, and the next moment he was ushered into the room by Dr. Western's old



servant, one of whose arms was heavily laden with the cases by which the worthy solicitor set such store. With an air of mock ceremony and reverence, Mr. Quatterly advanced towards the young nobleman, bowing profoundly.

“My lord,” he said, “I have the honour of informing your lordship, that all your lordship’s affairs are finally wound up, settled, and arranged. You are now, my lord, recognised by all parties as the undisputed possessor, in fee simple, of the Mallington Hall property, as both heir-at-law and next of kin of the late Earl of Mallington, to every stiver of whose real and personal estate, goods, chattels, messuages, tenements, and effects, of every kind, sort, or description whatsoever, your lordship has an indisputable and undisputed claim, as well as to the style, title, and honours, with all the rights and privileges thereunto appertaining, of Earl of Mallington, as I am ready to prove by the contents of those green boxes, and upon which I sincerely congratulate your lordship.”

“There’s a harangue,” he continued, turning to Louisa, while Morton inquired, “But what’s in the red box, my dear friend? I hope it is nothing of the Pandora kind.”

“Faith, I don’t know,” answered Mr. Quatterly. “Let’s see, — yes, that’s the right one; but there are two more which he has not brought in. In this, my lord, there is a very dangerous document. I scarcely dare to pronounce the name of it in a lady’s presence — a thing which

I will whisper in this fair lady's ear, lest she should be too terribly shocked — a marriage settlement," said Mr. Quatterly. "Having received a hint that it might be needful, I thought there could be no harm in having a little conversation on the subject with my friend Quin, the solicitor of the guardians and executors. The whole matter was settled with the most illegal haste and irregular rapidity; the draft made as short as possible — much to my own loss and the discomfiture of my clerks — laid before Bell, flaws discovered and corrected, the deed engrossed, and the draft lies at the top and the parchment at the bottom — if it is not wanted it can't be helped;" and Mr. Quatterly rubbed his hands and chuckled.

"Shall we look at the papers, Louisa?" said Morton, with a smile.

"Oh! no, no, Edmond!" she replied; "I can have nothing to do with them."

"Oh! but you must have to do with them, sweet lady, as far as signing them goes," answered Mr. Quatterly. "As to all the rest, I believe that can be settled between myself and Dr. Western. This noble personage's instructions I received before, and they have been attended to to the letter."

"The annuity?" asked Morton.

"Yes," replied Mr. Quatterly, "a thousand a year extra; which is nine hundred and ninety-nine pounds, some shillings, more than she deserves. Don't let me forget, though, that I have a proposal

from her to make to you two young people. I saw her last night at Sturton, you must know, consorting with a certain Captain Tankerville, whom I have taken care shall be laid in limbo again. That's one good thing done; and this time I have so framed my charge, that he will be transported for life—not hanged—as would have been the case, if I had pursued the other business. I'm not fond of hanging people, my dear; I can't even bear to see a mouse caught in a trap, its large black eyes look so reproachful at one."

Louisa's face grew grave in a moment; and Morton inquired—"But what of Mrs. Charlton? Any new demand, I wonder?"

"Oh, dear! no," answered Mr. Quatterly; "a simple suggestion, conceived in the most tender and considerate spirit. She proposes, my dear lady, that you and this noble lord should, with her full consent and approbation, be linked together in Hymen's fetters, without the least delay or hesitation, and take what is called the wedding tour—as if matrimony were nothing better than a roundabout at a fair—on the continent, or to any other sweet and delectable spot at a distance, that you may fix upon."

Morton smiled; but Louisa looked gravely up, saying, "But that is impossible, you know, my dear sir; for I shall have to appear at this dreadful trial."

Mr. Quatterly took Louisa's hand in his, and gazed at her with a kind and an affectionate look,

while he replied, "That is just what Mrs. Charlton wishes to prevent, my dear lady; and she judged that such a proposal would neither be very unpleasant to you, nor to my noble friend here."

Louisa moved to the table and seated herself, leaning her brow upon her hand. After a long pause, Morton approached and took her hand, and Louisa, looking up in his face, suffered him to see that her beautiful eyes were full of tears. "What shall I do, Edmond?" she inquired, in a low tone. Before he could answer, however, Dr. Western entered the room, and Louisa turned towards him as one of her best and surest advisers; but, when the matter was explained, it proved that the worthy rector brought no decision into the council, for he was as much embarrassed as any one.

"You must not ask me, my love; you must not ask me," he said. "I feel deeply for you, Louisa—I feel deeply for the unhappy woman herself; but ——, no, you must not ask me. It is a difficult case."

Louisa turned again to Morton; and he replied, in answer to her look—for she spoke not—"I am as much embarrassed as yourself, dear one. Were I to give way to the feelings of my heart, I should say, Come at once—let our marriage take place without delay, and leave the rest to fate. I do not know that one is called upon to sacrifice every feeling of the heart in such a case as this; but I will not enter into any casuistry, for I feel I am too much prejudiced by my own wishes."

“ Well spoken, Lucius Junius Brutus,” said Mr. Quatterly. “ I suppose I must say a word, though I told the good lady I would not. Remember, however, I don’t speak as a lawyer ; and, moreover, remember, I don’t speak as a magistrate ; neither is it for the sake of Mrs. Charlton I speak, nor for that of the young scamp, her son ; but for yours, my dear. My own opinion is, that for you to go into a witness-box, to give evidence against one who has called you sister—to endure the badgering and insinuations of cross-examination by a clever counsel—and, after all, to think throughout your life that your testimony went far to doom the young man to death, would well nigh kill you ; and, if it did not at once, would injure your health for years.”

“ It would,” replied Louisa ; “ of that I am well aware.”

“ Then the question is settled,” said Morton. “ I join my voice to his, and say, Let us go, Louisa.”

“ I will put it in another point of view,” said Mr. Quatterly. “ You are bound down in recognizances to appear and give evidence. The law itself has therefore fixed your responsibility at a certain sum of money ; if you choose to sacrifice that, it cannot be helped. So much for the law of the question : and, in good faith and truth, I can’t help thinking that you have no occasion to deal more hardly with yourself than the law does.”

“ With me there is but one question,” said



Morton—"What may be the effect of this upon your own health and happiness, Louisa?"

"You know, Edmond," replied Louisa, looking up in his face, "that I am not one to yield weakly—and, if it be right to stay and give evidence, I will do it at any risk. But I will acknowledge, that the very thought of standing in a court of justice, and saying those things which, however true, may deprive Alfred Latimer of life, takes my courage from me. I believe that I should hardly quit the court alive: and I am quite sure, that if anything I said were to produce the effect of his condemnation and execution, a gloom would come over me, which I could never shake off. Besides, if there were any doubt—if he persisted in denying his guilt to the last—I am very much afraid my own weakness would sometimes make me look upon myself as his murderer. Oh, it would be very horrible! And yet—and yet, I fear that he is guilty."

"I don't know," said Mr. Quatterly. "As the case stands at present, he will be hanged, to a certainty; but that does not at all prove that he is guilty, for there is a great deal of hanging honest men in England; and the palladium of English liberty, the trial by jury, is very much like tossing up a penny—heads win, tails lose. His defence is, I find, that he was poaching on your manors, my lord—that he got his hands and his clothes stained with the blood of some bird or beast that he shot, and never was near the house. He says,

that he left the game in a place called Gammer Mudge's Hole, somewhere in a wood near this place."

"A quantity of game was found there yesterday," observed Dr. Western, "quite in the back part of the cave. The constable who discovered it says that it is nearly in a state of putrefaction, so that the story may be true. I pray God that he may be able to prove it!"

"He 'll be hanged, notwithstanding, I should think," said Mr. Quatterly, "if the evidence remains as it is: and the very fact of this story having been put forward, will have the effect which this dear young lady fears, and make her fancy that she has aided in condemning an innocent man."

Louisa pressed her hand upon her eyes, and her cheek turned deadly pale, but Morton seated himself beside her and asked, in a low voice, "May I decide for you, Louisa?"

"Oh! yes, yes," cried Louisa Charlton; "do Edmond, do. I shall be quite satisfied and confident that you are right."

"Very well, then," said Morton, turning to Dr. Western, "it only remains for Louisa to fix the day—sometime between this and the first of next month, when I believe the assizes commence. Under all circumstances, dear Louisa, I think it will be wise to let the marriage be as private as possible, and therefore I shall not regret that all your establishment is not prepared for you."

Louisa looked up and smiled, but did not reply—and Dr. Western and Mr. Quatterly left the lover and her he loved alone together, retiring into the rector's library. They were soon after joined by Morton himself, with the news that Louisa had fixed that day week for the wedding; and Dr. Western smiled gravely, not at all doubting that love had a little to do with the decision at which they had arrived. The dearly beloved reader can have no doubt that they were both exceedingly wrong, that Louisa ought with unhesitating decision to have gone into court, and given her evidence against Alfred Latimer as if he had been a perfect stranger, that the love of public justice should have outweighed every private consideration, and triumphed over not only old associations, womanly weakness, and a feeble frame, but even over Cupid and Hymen both together. She was very wrong indeed—there can't be the least doubt of it! But still, I can but tell the story as it happened, and, only begging it to be remembered that I never set her up as a perfect character, beseech all my lady-loves, heroines, and others, not to follow the very bad example that she gave them in the present instance.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE inhabitants of Mallington were as happy as heart could wish—for I must give one general glance over the state of the people in that little town, before I quit them for ever. For years, for long years, perhaps never before in the history of the place, had such an inexhaustible fund of amusement and excitement been afforded to the Mallingtonians, as the events of the last few months had supplied. Fortune had been prodigal to them, and given them abundantly of all her most esteemed stores. A simple highway robbery would have been considered by them, some six months before, as a great treat; but now they had had two people knocked down, a mansion broken into, a murder committed, and a young gentleman, bred up amongst them, lodged in prison and charged with a capital felony. These were what the French cook would call the *pièces de resistance* of the feast—but there were numerous corner and side dishes, such as examinations before magistrates, coroner's inquests,

constables galloping and searching, a wounded gentleman, a prospective marriage, and the discovery that Mr. Morton was neither more nor less than the new Earl of Mallington. To judge from the satisfaction that was seen on every countenance, and the eternal cackle that was going on at different counters, one might have supposed that the whole town and every individual in it, had won a prize in the lottery. There wanted nothing but a fire and a suicide to make their happiness complete.

The Misses Martin, the Crumps, the Dixons, and all the rest of the fraternity were in a state of high glorification; but the unlearned reader may imagine that Miss Mathilda Martin would have a somewhat difficult card to play, considering how completely all her prognostications and surmises in regard to Mr. Morton had been falsified. A difficult card indeed it would have been to any unscientific person—but Mathilda—fair Mathilda, was a complete mistress of the art and mystery of gossip, and she knew how and when to turn round and take up the most opposite position to that which she had before assumed, to attribute the insinuations which had been proved false, and the assertions which had been contradicted, to the exact reverse of all the causes in which they had originated, and to vindicate her own claim to infallibility, by skilfully proving that she knew the truth the whole time, though for reasons of her own she had thought



fit to conceal it. Oh! blessed and beautiful powers of imagination, what a resource are ye to numerous most industrious classes of society, especially to the rogue, the swindler, the scandal-monger, and the detected gossip! What shifts and turns will ye not supply!—What schemes and plots will ye not furnish!—What evasions and prevarications will ye not provide in a moment! Not even the poet, the romance writer, or the historian—all deeply indebted to you as they are—owe you half so much as Miss Mathilda Martin! When Mr. Crump one day bought half a yard of coarse calico at the shop of the two spinsters, for the express purpose of maliciously condoling with Mathilda, upon the discovery that Mr. Morton was the exact reverse of all that she had stated him to be, any ordinary mind would have been overthrown, any mere mortal cheek would have blushed. But not so Mathilda Martin. She laughed, she nodded, she winked to her sister, and then inquired of Mr. Crump, “And do you really think, my good sir, I didn’t know?”

“I really can’t tell, Miss Martin,” replied the gentleman, “all I can speak of is what you said.”

“To be sure I said it,” answered Miss Mathilda, with a toss of the head. “And I did more, Mr. Crump, I went up to Mr. Middleton, and let him know what every one said in the place, as well as myself. But I knew very well all the time. And are you blind enough not to see why I did so?”

"I am indeed," answered Mr. Crump, maliciously.

"Poor man! Well, I'll tell you then," said the lady. "I knew quite well who he was before he had been here three days—oh, yes! I had good information, I can tell you—and I saw quite well that he had come down here to see what we were like, and to spy us all out in disguise. I determined that I'd force him to explain himself, and show who he really was. I've no notion of a gentleman, and a nobleman too, coming down and pretending to be what he is not, just to take poor people in: so I determined he shouldn't carry on that game long—I put down upon a piece of paper who he was, a long time ago, and said to those I could trust, "See if I'm not right."

Mr. Crump took his half-yard of coarse calico, and retreated home, saying to his wife, when he arrived, "She pretends that she knew all about it, and only told all those lies to make him explain himself. But I don't believe a word of it." Neither did Mrs. Crump, nor any one else in the place.

Miss Mathilda, however, as soon as the worthy gentleman had evacuated the shop, turned to her sister with a laugh, saying, "I don't choose those Crumps to get the better of me."

Miss Martin quite agreed in her sister's view of the case. But a new source of satisfaction was about to be opened before them, treading upon

the heels of a slight disappointment. Before half an hour was over, some of the neighbours came in to inform them that Alfred Latimer would certainly get off, for that the story he had told was found to be quite true, and that the game he said he had been shooting, and which had blooded his clothes, had been discovered in Gammer Mudge's Hole, by Harry Soames, the constable.

This was a dreadful shock to the feelings of the Miss Martins, not only because they had hoped with all their hearts to see Alfred Latimer hanged, but because they had predicted years before that his life would terminate by that process. It made them seriously uneasy; it even suggested to the mind of Miss Mathilda that it might be as well to supply some little bits of evidence against him from her own copious manufactory; but that she did not dare to do eventually. She could not altogether, however, refrain from insinuations, and for once in her life she did not hit far from the mark. When Mrs. Dixon told her that Mr. Latimer's acquittal was certain, now that the game had been found in Wenlock Wood, Miss Mathilda replied sharply, "Pooh, nonsense! of course he got some one to put it there for him." These words of Miss Martin were taken up by Mrs. Dixon, and were repeated, far and wide, during the evening and the next day throughout Mallington. They did not reach the ears, however, of Mr. Henry Soames, till two days after, and as soon as he could—which was not till the next morning, he went

into the shop of the Misses Martin, in order to hear further particulars, for he looked upon the rumour as an imputation upon his skill and penetration.

"So I hear, Miss Mathilda," he said, "that you declare Mr. Latimer has got some one to put the game that I found in the cave since the murder. Now I should like to know what evidence you have got upon the subject; for it doesn't do to say such things unless you can prove them, 'specially when a young man's life's at stake."

"Oh! I've got no evidence," said Miss Mathilda, sharply. "I only guess it was so. It was so likely a thing, it might strike a baby."

"I don't think anything of the kind," answered Mr. Soames. "The game had been there a long time, I'll swear. There were five pheasants and two hares, all stinking; and one had got its head off, as if a fox had got at it."

"Just as easy to put stinking game there as fresh," said Miss Mathilda, dryly.

What the constable would have answered cannot be told, for just as he was about to reply, and that somewhat hotly, who should trip in but Mr. Gibbs, with his usually important air still more important than ever. He began by purchasing a number of yards of white muslin for neckcloths, and while Miss Martin attended to his order, and cut off, with the aid of her thumb, a quarter of a yard less than she charged him for, Mr. Gibbs turned round and greeted Harry Soames, whom he had not seen for ten days or a fortnight.

"Well, Mr. Gibbs, you have been to London, I suppose," said the worthy constable.

"Yes," said the traveller. "I went up to account to my employers, and they made a great piece of work at my having remained in these parts so long, although they couldn't deny that I had sold more of the Fragrant Balm of Trinidad than either of their three other travellers. They were very unjust, Mr. Soames, both to me and to that precious balsam, whose peculiar quality it is to revive and nourish the growth of the hair, to restore the natural curl, and impart —"

"Well, but how did it all end?" asked Mr. Soames, who had heard about the Balm of Trinidad.

"Why, in my resigning, to be sure. What they said was tantamount to a want of confidence, so I instantly tendered my resignation, which was accepted; and having a slight inkling that something was to be done here, I set off from London immediately, and should have been here yesterday afternoon, had I not stopped at Sturton to hear all about this new discovery there."

"What new discovery?" asked Mr. Soames. "Do you mean about the game?"

"Game? oh dear no," cried Gibbs. "I mean about the receiver of stolen goods—the fence, as they call him. He's a Jew, and having been taken up on suspicion, has confessed it all: how Williams and Mr. Latimer came to him the



night before, and made a bargain with him about the sale of the plate and things they were going to steal."

"There, I told you so," cried Miss Mathilda Martin. "Why the whole thing's as plain as the nose on a man's face."

"That depends upon the length of it, my dear madam," said Mr. Gibbs, whose own proboscis was of no very extraordinary extent. "However, what I tell you is quite true. The man was taken up at St. Albans, it having been proved that he was down here at Sturton just at the time, and a great many odd things were found in his chaise."

The conversation had become unpleasant to Mr. Henry Soames, and out he went without waiting for the further comments of Miss Mathilda.

"Pray, Mr. Gibbs, what do you want the muslin for?" asked the elder Miss Martin. "I only wish to know how you would like them hemmed; if it's for neck-handkerchiefs we can get them done for you."

"You must get them done very quick, Miss Martin," said the traveller, "for I shall want them soon. The truth is, I have just engaged myself in the service of the Earl of Mallington. I am to act as his first groom of the chambers. You know," he added, with a significant look, "we've been in a good many little affairs together—the apprehending those two ruffians and the like: so each knows his man. I can depend upon him, and he can depend upon me."

"Very true, Mr. Gibbs, very true," said Miss

Mathilda; "that's a great advantage, Mr. Gibbs. I hope you won't forget us when you are established at the Hall. And when is my lord to be married, for that's the next thing, I suppose? I should not wonder, for my part, if it took place immediately. I saw the beautiful new carriage that came down yesterday. It's mighty handsome, that's certain, but very plain for an earl—no arms, no coronet, nor anything. But I dare say he wouldn't have been in such a hurry to have it down, if he weren't soon going to make use of it."

"I think you are mistaken," answered Mr. Gibbs, "for I found the earl and the young lady sitting quite quietly together, and looking anything but very merry."

"Ah! that's no sign," rejoined Miss Mathilda. "He always had a grave look; and though she was as gay and light-hearted a thing as one could see, before her father took up with Mrs. Latimer, she has never been so cheerful since, that I will say. See what comes of old men marrying intriguing widows."

With this moral reflection terminated the more important part of the conversation between Mr. Gibbs and the Misses Martin, and we must now for a time leave the party in the shop, as it may be necessary to show what was the effect produced in other quarters by similar tidings to those which the worthy traveller brought over from Sturton to Mallington.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

It was just the governor's dinner hour—an hour at which the worthy officer was not likely to disturb himself, when the swivel-eyed turnkey, whom Jack Williams had commended to Alfred Latimer's notice, entered the young gentleman's room, and closed the door quietly behind him saying, "I've got some news for you, sir;" and approaching close to the table, he continued, in a whisper, "that game story is no go, for they have caught Levi, the fence, and he's stagged. It's all out, how you and Jack saw him at the Bell, and made a deal with him about the stuff."

Alfred Latimer struck his hand against his forehead, in a fit of rage and despair, but the turnkey took upon himself, on this occasion, an office which turnkeys are not very frequently found to perform. "Pooh, nonsense!" he said, "don't take on so. The matter's not a bit the worse for that. If you had stood trial, it would have gone hard with your neck, even if the fence had not peached. Why, the judge as is coming down is Sir John ——,

and he always sums up again the prisoner. He keeps the black cap close beside him ; and is sure to get it on one way or another, afore he's done."

"If I had stood the trial?" exclaimed Alfred Latimer. "I don't understand what you mean. How could I help standing the trial?" and he looked in the man's face, apprehensive lest he had discovered the means prepared by Williams and Brown to effect their escape from the gaol. The turnkey's countenance, however, was very difficult to read, for the peculiar construction of the eyes, and the impossibility of knowing which of the two was looking at you, rendered the meaning always doubtful.

"Oh! you knows very well what I means," rejoined the turnkey, "it's all settled; and if you manage anything sharp, there'll be no more difficulty about it nor drinking a glass of small beer."

"Still I don't understand you," answered Alfred Latimer, "you must give me a hint of what is to be done or I shall never know how to do it."

"What! hasn't yer wife told you?" asked the turnkey, "didn't you see her this arternoon?"

"No," answered Alfred Latimer, "she hasn't been here for these two days."

"Oh yes! she were, this werry night," rejoined the other; "but I know how it is. There's been a bit of a row about all the liberty granted here."

One of the justices has been a-jawing the governor, and so he's sent her away. I shouldn't wonder, now all this has come out, if they put Williams and Brown in irons again. I don't suppose our gentleman will do that with you, and if he do, we must get 'em off, that's all."

"But what is to be done—how is it to be effected?" demanded the prisoner.

"Stay a bit," said the jailor. And opening the door, he looked up and down the passage, to ensure that there was nobody there who might remark his long conference with the young culprit. Having satisfied himself in this respect, he returned to the room again, and proceeded, "Why, if you've heard nothing, I must tell you. You see, one night last week when I was off duty, and out at the Green Man, a drinking on a pot of beer, up comes to me a feller they calls Captain Tankerville, and says he wants a word with me. And so he had a word, and then he introduced me to a lady at the Bell, as is your mother—and a mighty cunning lady she is too, as ever I see'd."

The jailor meant this as a compliment—for shrewdness was in his estimation the highest quality of the female mind. Alfred Latimer received it as it was intended, and merely asked "Well, well, what was done?"

"Why, we came to terms," replied the swivel-eyed turnkey, "and she bound me down pretty tight, didn't she? But she was free enough of the cash, and that's the principal. So I promised



you should see your way out some dark night; and you must keep yourself ready."

"Can't it be to-night," demanded the prisoner, eager to ensure that no new circumstance might intervene to deprive him of this fresh sprung hope.

"To-night! Lord-a-mercy, no!" replied the turnkey. "Why there's nothing ready, and Dick's on night duty. No, no, wait a bit, there's plenty of time. The day arter to-morrow the governor must go away to Huntington, and he'll be away all night. I know quite well that Mallett who'll be left in charge, will take that minute to get drunk, for he ha'n't been drunk this half year, and he can't stand it much longer nor that. Dick mayhap, will help him; at all events, he'll take more nor usual; and if he's frightened to do it outright, we can contrive to hocus the last glass of his grog. Then we shall have all this ward to ourselves, and as the porter is in the job, you'll have nothing to do but to walk out. However, I'll tell you all about it another time. I must be off now, for fear the folks should think something." Thus saying, he hurried away, and left Alfred Latimer to his own meditations. Those meditations, however, were lighter and more joyful than they had been for many a day. He had now hope, looking all the brighter from the darkness out of which it sprung.

It may have been remarked by the reader, that Alfred Latimer made no inquiry of the turnkey.

as to whether his companions in guilt and misfortune were to benefit with himself in the means taken to procure his liberation—and the truth is he had no intention that they should. Even in the story which he had told both to the governor of the gaol and to one of the turnkeys, in regard to the game which he said he had left in Wenlock Wood, he had shown no consideration for them, leaving their own share of the transactions on the night of the murder to be explained by them as they best could, and instead of declaring, as he had assured Williams he would, that they had all been out upon the same expedition together, had stated that he had met the other two accidentally, and merely asked a passage in their boat. It was not therefore to be expected that on the present occasion he would pay any great attention to their safety. He determined then, to keep the whole project which had just been revealed to him, a profound secret from his two companions, and when he saw them in the yard, to affect the greatest interest in their scheme for escape, as if he had no other hope but that. We lay our plans, we scheme, we project, we advance in execution, and then comes fate and throws some little insignificant obstacle in the way, by which all our devices are overthrown.

The next morning, early, the governor of the prison came to visit him, with a grave though civil expression of countenance. "I am sorry

to tell you, Mr. Latimer," he said, "that I must make some change in] your treatment. Observations have been made and sharp things said, so that I'm afraid I must put you in irons, especially after what has come out before the magistrates."

"Good Heaven! I hope not," cried Alfred Latimer turning very pale; for notwithstanding the assurance of the turnkey that he should be freed from those unpleasant appendages, the very idea was horrible to him. "There can be no necessity for such harshness, sir—I have done nothing since I have been here, surely, to make you alter your conduct."

"I can't say you have," replied the other, "and I should not think of doing it myself, but for these visiting justices. It is a great bore to have such a pack of meddling old women always at one's heels,] finding fault with this thing one day, and quite the reverse another. But I can't help myself, Mr. Latimer, and I must either do as I have said, or deny you the liberty of the yard, which would be worse."

"Oh dear! no," exclaimed the young man; "I would a great deal rather never go out again, than have those irons on."

"Well, if you choose to stay in your room," said the governor, "it does not so much matter; but if you were to be seen out in a different way from the other two men charged with you, there would be a great piece of work made."

Alfred Latimer repeated earnestly that he greatly preferred confinement to shackles ; and after a few more words, the governor left him, little knowing that there was treason in the camp. During the next day, and the day that followed, the prisoner had but small intercourse with his friend the turnkey, though once or twice, when he had brought something into the room, the man whispered words of consolation, such as, "It's all right,"—"Keep a good heart,"—"Mind you be ready."

On the night of the second day, however, when Mrs. Charlton's son had lain down to rest, and as near as he could guess, about two o'clock in the morning, he was aroused from sleep by hearing the door unlocked, and looking towards it, he perceived his squinting friend entering, with a lantern in his hand. Approaching his bedside, the man set down the light, and seated himself, saying, "I'm on night duty this evening, so I just came to tell you how all was settled. Tomorrow there will be a chaise waiting for you at the end of the bridge, so, as soon as you are out, make for it direct, and then off wherever you like. It's brought from a great distance, so no one will know anything of which way it goes."

"Ay, but how to get out of this place is the difficult matter," replied Alfred Latimer. "How is that to be done, if one of your comrades will be on duty?"

"Never you mind that," answered the man.

"I'll manage Dick, only you be ready and mind what I say. He'll go his round about twelve, and most likely take a look in. You had better be a-bed and asleep. Then a little while after, you'll hear the door unlocked, and the bolts undrawn, but don't you take no notice, case of accidents. Wait five minutes, and then go down the passage into the yard—you know the way—and you'll find the door open; then cross to t'other door, where you've often seen me a standing—what I call watching my lambs at play—go through that into t'other yard, and then straight through the lodge—it's just up the steps, you know, on the right hand, mind you don't make a mistake."

"No, no," answered Alfred Latimer, "I know it quite well. That's the way I was brought in."

"Ay! you're the man as has got an eye for the country," answered the turnkey. "Well, you'll find both the wicket and the gate open, and nobody there to say nothing to you; so just walk out, and it's all done. Everything will be made snug as soon as you are gone, and they'll never find it out till breakfast time to-morrow."

"And what will become of Williams and Brown?" asked Alfred Latimer, more to say something than from any great interest in their fate.

"Why, they'll be hanged, you see," replied the turnkey. "But they're mighty angry with you, I can tell you; for some of the fellers let them into what you said about meeting them accidentally in



the Park, after you had prigged the game." And having repeated all his directions very distinctly, the turnkey left him.

Little sleep did the prisoner obtain that night; and the next day also passed in the uneasiness of expectation, mingled with apprehension. Towards evening, however, various little signs of irregularity showed him that the governor was absent, as had been predicted he would be. The meals were brought half an hour behind the usual time; there was more noise and bustle than was common in the prison; and the turnkeys whistled as they walked along the passage. But time slipped away; one hour passed after another; the clock of the neighbouring church marked for Alfred Latimer the approach of the period appointed for his liberation; and when at length it struck eleven, he threw down some clothes by the bedside, to make it seem as if he had undressed, and then crept in between the sheets just as he was, without even taking off his boots. Scarcely had he been half an hour in bed, when the sound of an irregular footfall, and of a voice half humming half singing one of the common slang songs of the day, was heard coming along the passage. In a minute or two after the door was opened, and Dick the turnkey looked in, with his lantern in his hand. Raising his head, Alfred Latimer could easily perceive that the good man had already taken more of some potent liquor than was quite consistent with the proper execution of his functions.

“ Ah! you’re a-bed, are you,” he said, with a hiccup. “ You are generally one of the late ones, as all them are who have candles, and such stuff, allowed them. If I were governor, they should all be treated alike, every man of them, rich and poor, smasher and flasher, diddler and devil.

“ Ye pads, ye scamps, ye divers,  
And all upon the lay  
In Tothill Fields, blithe sheep walks,  
Like lambs that sport and play.  
Oh! rattling up your darbies,  
Come hither at my call;  
I ’m jigger dubber here,  
So you’re welcome to mill Doll.  
Tol de rol, de rol.”

And, singing this very elegant composition, Dick the turnkey retired on the round.

Alfred Latimer lay and listened for every passing sound; but the hour of twelve struck, one and two followed, and no one approached his door. Apprehension took possession of his mind, and all the phantasmagoria shapes of dread passed before his eyes. Now he thought that his confederate had forgotten him; now, that some obstacle had occurred, and that the attempt must be postponed; now, that the whole had been discovered, and the plan frustrated; now, that his mother and himself had been deceived, the money taken, and the act unperformed. At length there was a step, slow and deliberate, along the passage. He heard two other doors tried, and then the footfall came

nearer. A key was placed in the lock ; with as little noise as possible it was turned, the bolts withdrawn, and the step moved on again. For nearly five minutes he lay and listened ; then rose, and, approaching the door, put his ear to the key-hole. All was silent ; and opening the door quietly he looked out. A lantern, as usual, hung against the wall half way down the passage, but no other object met his eye ; and after returning for a moment to take his hat, he stole silently out, proceeded to the door at the end of the corridor, which was unlocked, and then down six steps to another door which led into the yard ; it, also, was unlocked, but, as he drew it back, it creaked sharply upon the hinges, and Alfred Latimer paused for a moment or two, dreading that the sound might have called attention.

As all remained silent, however, he ventured to go out, and walked on tiptoes across the yard. The night was very dark, the moon shone not, and no stars were to be seen, but he knew the way well, and hurrying on through the doorway into the outer-yard, advanced towards the lodge. The door was ajar, a light was shining within, and mounting the steps, the prisoner peeped in, gaining a clear view of the interior by the light of a long unsnuffed candle which stood upon the table. No person was to be seen, and he advanced, somewhat hurriedly, fancying he heard a step behind him. The wicket was open, but the outer-gate was closed and locked ; the

key, however, was in the inside, and, with a shaking hand, the young malefactor turned it, and was about to throw back the door. A bolt below, which he had not observed, had to be drawn first, and he was stooping down over it, when he heard a clank and a step, and a strong hand grasped him by the neck.

Starting up, and shaking himself free, he turned round, and beheld his companion in crime, Williams, with a look of dark and bitter determination upon his face.

"You villain and you blackguard," cried the man, again seizing him by the throat, "so you thought to sneak off in this way, did you?"

"Hush, hush!" said Alfred Latimer, "if you would save your own life and mine, be silent, and come with me."

"What! with these on?" cried Williams aloud, glancing at his irons. "No," and he added a blasphemous oath, "——, if I don't serve you as you served Edmonds;" and he made a great effort to dash him against the wall. Alfred Latimer, however, was strongly made, and Williams was encumbered by his fetters, but the struggle was now evidently to be for life or death; and grappling with his adversary, and putting forth all his vigour and activity, the young culprit endeavoured to thrust him beyond the wicket, and close it against him, while he made his escape by the door. With a grasp of iron, however, Williams clung to him, now

dragging him forward, now thrusting him back ; and thus, in terrible but silent strife, they reeled about upon the floor, sometimes hurling each other against the wall, sometimes against the porter's bed, till at length, as they dashed against the table in the midst of the room, it was overthrown. The light fell with it, and for a single instant after, the struggle continued. Then, both came down with a heavy fall together ; but Alfred Latimer was undermost ; the back of his head struck with a violent blow against the edge of the bed ; and a long deathlike groan followed.

The next instant, a light began to spread through the room, and a quick flame ran up the bed-curtains, against which the candle had fallen.



## CHAPTER XXX.

THE hour appointed for Louisa Charlton's marriage was the earliest allowed by the canon. The license had been obtained, the settlement signed, and all the arrangements made as quietly as possible. Dr. Western was to perform the ceremony, and Louisa's other guardian had come from town in order to give her away. Mrs. Charlton's written consent to the marriage had been obtained, and though she declined to be present at the ceremony, alleging her anxiety for her son as her excuse, she wrote a neat, flowery note to the Earl of Mallington, expressing her sense — as she termed it — of the liberality and consideration for her interests which he had shown in the matter of the settlements. All was arranged and finally prepared, before Morton left the rectory, at eleven on the night preceding; and the whole party were about to retire to rest, when one of the game-keepers from Mallington Park came over to tell the worthy clergyman that poor Lucy, who had been ill for the last three days, was not ex-

pected to get through the night, and asked eagerly to see him.

Dr. Western required no pressing, but set out on foot with the man, and was soon by the unhappy girl's bedside. Fever was strong upon her: her cheek flushed, her eye bright and glistening, and her strength all gone; but she was perfectly sensible, and looked up with a faint smile when the clergyman entered. He soon found that the disease of the body still owed its cause to the mind; for it seemed that some one had foolishly told her of the revelations made by the Jew receiver, Levi, and that, from that moment, becoming convinced that all her worst suspicions had been well founded, and that her husband had been an accessory to her father's death, she had given herself up to despair, and self-reproach.

All the exertions of Mr. Nethersole had proved of no avail; and although Dr. Western entertained but little hope of any change for the better in her corporeal health, he sat down beside her, and tried, first by prayer, and then by argument, to tranquillize and bring comfort to her mind.

At first Lucy murmured, more than once, "Oh, if my father's eye could have seen me aiding his murderer, and helping him to escape, what would he have thought of his poor child!"

"You are tormenting yourself, Lucy," replied Dr. Western; "with vain imaginations. The only eye that could and did see the whole, was the eye of a holier and higher Being, and He

saw the motives as well as the actions, and the heart likewise. You tell me, Lucy, that this young man assures you that he is innocent — God grant that it may still prove so! Do not let us judge him before even human law has pronounced upon his case; and until such is the result, you are perfectly justified in forgetting all, except that he is your husband. But first, my dear child, let us pray to Him who sees all hearts, to strengthen and support you under every affliction, for your mind is weakened, and your faith diminished, or you would not suffer such terrors to prey upon your health;" and kneeling down, the worthy clergyman did pray with earnestness and devotion.

For three hours he remained with the sick girl, leaving no means untried to soothe her, and his efforts were not without success — she became more calm, she listened and seemed convinced by his reasoning — she joined feebly in the prayers, and acknowledged that she felt happier and better. An inclination to sleep then came on, and about three o'clock in the morning Dr. Western left her, and commenced his solitary walk home. Though a man of an equable mind, and so much accustomed to contemplate the course of human life with all its joys and sorrows, under one point of view: namely, in reference to a future state, yet his heart was naturally too kindly not to feel saddened by the sight of suffering and sorrow, and he walked on, melancholy, though not gloomy, along the little path, which he could scarcely

descry through the thickness of the night. As he approached the gates, however, the air seemed to grow lighter, and he could see his way more distinctly. He did not look up till he reached the middle of the bridge, and then a red gleam which shone reflected from the water through the balustrades of the bridge, caused him to raise his eyes first to the sky, where the heavy clouds were glowing as if with the approach of dawn, and then along the valley through which the river flowed, where the cause of the glare soon became apparent. Up from beyond the gentle slopes of the hills, and the belts of wood which crossed the country to the west, rose large volumes of smoke, glowing with the bright blaze of a fierce fire below, and every now and then dotted with sparks of more intense light, as fragments of paper and linen, caught by the fire, were hurried up by the current into the air; and twice he thought he saw a column of flame rush up for a moment into the sky, as if some roof had fallen in and given free vent to the blaze. He paused for several minutes watching the conflagration, but as well as he could calculate, the fire was at the distance of some seven or eight miles, and it was hopeless to think of rendering any assistance. Even as he gazed, indeed, the light became less vivid, and judging that the flames had nearly exhausted themselves, the good rector turned his steps homeward, and retired to rest.

Though kept up so late, he rose at his usual

hour on the following morning, and shortly after joined the party in the drawing-room to read prayers. Louisa, though evidently anxious and agitated, and dressed as plainly as usual, looked well and beautiful; but scarcely were the morning prayers over, and the whole party about to set out for the church, when Dr. Western was called out of the room, and then in turn summoned Mrs. Evelyn to council. His face was so unusually grave, that Louisa marked it with some alarm; but whatever it was that he communicated to his sister, she replied aloud, "Oh! no, on no account. There is no need for it, indeed; and I never like delays in such cases."

They then both returned to the drawing-room, without mentioning at all the subject of their conference. But Louisa — who had formed her own judgment of what it was about, inquired somewhat anxiously, "Have you heard of poor Lucy this morning, my dear sir?"

"Yes," replied Dr. Western, "she is somewhat better, they say. I shall see her again by and by."

"Then pray say all that is kind from me," rejoined Louisa. "I have left a little present for her in my room. Tell her I think she will value it, because I have always worn it."

"Now, Miss Charlton—now, Miss Charlton," said her father's old partner, pointing to the clock on the mantel-piece, "I know the earl is waiting, for I saw him pass with Mr. Quatterly ten minutes ago."



The hint was sufficient; and, passing by the garden, through the churchyard, on foot, they entered the church. Only once Louisa Charlton looked to the right or to the left, and that was as she passed her father's tomb. Mrs. Evelyn saw that her lip moved, and a drop gathered in her eye; and, touching her arm gently, she said, in a low tone, "You have chosen, my dear, as he would have chosen for you."

"I trust—I am sure it is so," answered Louisa; and in a few minutes more she stood before the altar with him she loved. She was a good deal agitated; but yet her heart beat joyfully, as words were spoken which realised the dream of young affection, swept far away all the doubts and apprehensions which had clung about the last few months, and made her the wife of one to whom all the tender feelings of the heart had long been given. Once, during the ceremony, she raised her look to his face, and their eyes met; but the expression of Morton's countenance was still that which she could have wished, and that which perhaps she expected. There was nothing of light and exuberant joy, nothing of careless merriment; it was deep, tender, happy—as if he felt the great import of every word he spoke, and promised to cherish, love, and protect her from the depth of the heart. When the ceremony was over, the register signed, and everything complete, Louisa turned and bade adieu to Dr. Western and his sister, giving a tear that she could not suppress to the parting with those from whom

she had known parental tenderness and affection ; and then entering the plain chariot which stood at the church door, was soon rolling away from Mallington with her husband. She owned to herself, she did not conceal from him, that she was happy ; and the clouds that had preceded, and the storm that had fallen so heavily at last, only made the sunshine that followed all seem more bright and sparkling.

More than a fortnight elapsed before the Earl and Countess of Mallington, then stopping for a day or two beside the Lake of Geneva, heard of the events which had taken place at Sturton. The county gaol, they were informed in a letter from Dr. Western, had been burned nearly to the ground, on the night preceding their wedding-day. What had become of Mr. Latimer no one knew, the worthy doctor said. Many of the prisoners had made their escape ; some had perished in the flames, as well as one of the turnkeys, who was supposed to have been drunk at the time. It was generally imagined, however, the letter went on to say, that Mr. Latimer had contrived to fly ; for the wing of the building in which he had been confined was the only part left standing, and the room which he had inhabited had been found tenantless, and with the door open, though no one could tell whether it had been unlocked by one of the jailors during the fire or not. The man Williams had also escaped it appeared ; but that, Dr. Western said, was easily accounted for ; as the wall of his cell, when exa-

mined, proved to be pierced completely through, leaving an aperture communicating with the yard.

There were one or two circumstances, connected with the burning of the gaol, which Dr. Western did not think fit to detail in the absence of all positive certainty. In the lodge of the gaol, where the fire was supposed to have originated, a body was found, so disfigured by the flames that it was impossible to identify it. The back part of the skull, however, was found to have been fractured; and a celebrated surgeon of the place, upon examination, pronounced that the injury must have been received before death. The worthy rector of Mallington himself visited the spot, and viewed the body; and though he could not venture to speak positively, yet from the appearance of one hand which the fire had not touched, he entertained little doubt that Alfred Latimer had there ended his career of folly and crime.

The man Brown was brought to trial some ten days after the destruction of the gaol, convicted of robbery and murder, and executed as he well deserved; but before death, as was then more common with criminals than now, he made a full confession of his crime, telling all that had occurred when he and his two companions made their way into Mallington Hall. He protested to the last that neither he nor Williams had any share in the murder of Edmonds, the park-keeper; but laid the guilt of that terrible act, justly, upon him who had really committed it.

Dr. Western did all that was possible to prevent these statements from reaching the ears of poor Lucy, but his precautions proved vain, and though she rallied a little, and even sat up for several days, yet six weeks had not passed ere the poor girl lay by the side of her father in the churchyard at Mallington.

What became of Alfred Latimer's companion, Williams, was never correctly ascertained, and the people of the place believe he is still living, and fancy that he appears in the neighbourhood from time to time, seeking an opportunity of committing fresh depredations. However that may be, certain it is, that about a year after, in dragging for the body of a lad who had been drowned, the people of Sturton pulled up from the bottom of the stream, just below the bridge, the corpse of a man in a state of complete decomposition. The height was exactly that of the notorious Jack Williams, the depth of chest and breadth of shoulders so remarkable in that malefactor were the same, and the fetters by which the limbs were still encumbered, showed that at all events he was one of the prisoners escaped from the gaol. Every person who took advantage of the confusion occasioned by the fire to fly, was recaptured soon after, or convicted subsequently for fresh offences, with the exception of Williams and Alfred Latimer, so that in the end, little, if any doubt remained as to whose was the body which had been found in the river.

The rest of the personages mentioned in this history, went on in the course to which their several characters prompted them. The Misses Martin gossiped and slandered to the end; Mallington remained nearly the same as ever, till a few years ago, when a railroad was carried past it, and all was changed; Mrs. Windsor fondly flattered herself that she should be the housekeeper at Mallington-Hall, on the return of the Earl and Countess from the continent, but she was disappointed in this expectation, receiving, however, as a consolation, a very comfortable annuity for her services to Miss Charlton: and Captain Tankerville was provided for in another way, being transported for life.

The only person who remains to be mentioned, is the mother of Alfred Latimer—and her fate is soon told—she sat down with great resignation under her misfortunes, reposing upon her selfishness which is a very comfortable pillow for those who have nothing else to rest upon. With an income of two thousand a year, however, her selfishness was very well provided for, and it was said she took other means of consoling herself also—the consumption of wine in her household being considerable. At all events, her sorrow was of the kind that grows fat, and before her death she was extended to an enormous size, and had also become a little coarse in skin and complexion. Dr. Western and Mrs. Evelyn sleep in Mallington churchyard. And of the Earl and



Countess what shall I say? I saw them lately, dear reader, and they seemed—as far as mortal eye could see—to be very happy—happy in the means, the opportunity, and the love of beneficence—happy in the respect of those whose respect they value—happy in honour and in virtue, and in calm and placid tempers—happy in themselves, in their offspring, and unchanging affection.

THE END.

NEW BOOKS PUBLISHED BY SMITH, ELDER & CO., CORNHILL.

1.

**THE JESUITS IN ENGLAND.**

*In One Volume Post 8vo. Price 10s. 6d. bound in cloth.*

**THE NOVITIATE;**

Or, "A YEAR AMONG THE ENGLISH JESUITS ; a Personal Narrative.  
With an Essay on the Constitutions, the Confessional Morality, and History of  
the Jesuits. By ANDREW STEINMETZ. (*Now ready.*)

2.

**SEAT OF WAR IN INDIA.**

*In One Volume Post 8vo. Price 5s. cloth, with a Map.*

**THE PUNJAUB;**

Being a brief Account of the Country of the Sikhs, its Extent, History, Commerce,  
Productions, Government, Manufactures, Laws, Religion, &c.

By LIEUT.-COL. STEINBACH, Late of the Lahore Service.

*A New Edition Revised, containing an Account of the recent events in the Punjaub.*

\* \* The Map may be had separately, price 1s. coloured. (*Just ready.*)

3.

**SECOND SERIES OF TALES OF THE COLONIES.**

*In Three Volumes Post 8vo. Price £1 11s. 6d.*

**THE BUSHRANGER OF VAN DIEMEN'S LAND.**

By C. ROWCROFT, Esq., Author of "Tales of the Colonies," &c. (*Now ready.*)

4.

**A SECOND VOLUME OF**

**"MODERN PAINTERS:"**

Treating of the THEORETIC AND IMAGINATIVE FACULTIES.

By A GRADUATE OF OXFORD. (*In 1st week of April.*)

5.

*In Imperial 8vo. a New Edition, revised by the Author, of*

**THE FIRST VOLUME OF**

**"MODERN PAINTERS:"**

By A GRADUATE OF OXFORD. (*Early in April.*)

6.

**WIT AND HUMOUR.**

By LEIGH HUNT.

Uniform with "IMAGINATION AND FANCY." (*Shortly.*)

7.

*In Three Volumes Post 8vo. Price £1 11s. 6d.*

**LLEWELYN'S HEIR;**

A TALE OF WELSH LIFE. (*Nearly ready.*)











UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA



3 0112 049064162